

THE JAMES BOYS WEEKLY.

Containing Stories of Adventure.

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No. 46.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 8, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE JAMES BOYS' LONGEST RUN; OR, CHASED A THOUSAND MILES.

By D.W. STEVENS.



When he opened the door Jesse and Cole covered him with their revolvers. "We want you, Haynes," Jesse said. He was almost paralyzed at seeing them. "Hands up!" He held them up. Jesse added: "Put on your clothes." They disarmed him and then put bracelets on him.

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By D. W. STEVENS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING—JESSE JAMES AND THE DOCTOR.

Precisely at midnight twelve masked men on horseback emerged from the woods near the banks of the rolling Missouri, a few miles below Kansas City, and rode out into an open field to a knoll some two hundred yards away.

The stars were shining brightly overhead, and yet it was a dark night.

One would think a mask entirely unnecessary if concealment of features were the object of its use.

Each mask was black, covering the face of its wearer to the tip of his nose, leaving the mouth, chin and lower part of the jaws exposed.

Each seemed independent of the others as he rode forward to the knoll, as not a word was spoken by any one till they all surrounded one masked rider on a superb black horse.

He held out his right hand toward the masked figure on his right. In his left he held a cocked revolver.

The mask on his right rode up and grasped his hand in a peculiar manner.

"All right, Jim Cummins," said the man on the black horse.

Another rode up and gave him a different kind of a grip

"Frank," he said.

The third one came up, grasped his hand and was called:

"Cole."

The fourth followed and was greeted with:

"Wood Hite."

The others followed, each to hear his name called in low tones, and then pass on.

Every man had a grip of his own, and when he felt it the leader called his name, till eleven had passed before him.

"You are all here," he said, when the last had given him the grip.

"Yes," each responded in low tones.

"Have any of you seen the new man sent after us?" the man on the black horse asked.

All but one spoke up at once:

"I have not."

"I have," said one on the left.

The leader turned quickly and asked:

"Where?"

"At Martin's, in Kearney."

"When?"

"Last night."

"How did you spot him?"

"By a telegram."

"From whom?"

"The Governor of Missouri."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"Didn't get hold of it."

"Didn't, eh?"

"No. I merely saw it."

"Where?"

"At Martin's, in his hands."

"How?"

"I was leaning against the wall in a chair as if asleep with my hat drawn down over my face. He was in the chair on my right, and I saw him pull out a bundle of letters and telegrams and begin a search as if for a particular one. When he found it he opened it. I glanced over and read it.

"How did it read?"

"It was sent to Hal Haynes, Laclede Hotel, St. Louis, and read: 'Go to Kearney and watch. They go there frequently. You can soon get clues enough to locate the band. J. J. was there himself last week.'"

"And the governor's name was signed to that?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, I read it easily."

"Didn't he mean for you to see it?"

"No; he thought I was asleep."

"Hal Haynes is the man. I knew that much, but wanted to locate him. I was in Kearney last week with Cole, but can't see how the governor found it out."

"They are watching us closely, Jesse," said the mask on the right of the leader.

"Yes, and we have got to be as attentive to them. Somebody in Kearney gave me away, and yet only two people knew I was there."

"Did the doctor know?" Cole asked.

"Yes, and his niece."

"Ah!"

"What's the matter?"

"The niece."

"Isn't she all right?"

"I don't know; but she has a lover."

"How do you know that?"

"I heard it at Martin's."

"Then it leaked out through her."

"Yes, of course."

"I don't believe it," said one of the masks.

"Why?" the leader asked.

"Sallie Gray would never betray us. She is as true as steel."

"Yes," said another. "I would stake my life on her fidelity."

"That's all right," the leader said. "But a woman in love is true to her lover first in all things. If she is not in love with a member of our band she must not know of us again in any shape. I'll see the doctor to-morrow and tell him about it. Now, boys, we meet Sunday midnight at the old mill," and the man on the black horse rode away in one direction and the others went off in as many different ones.

The conference, if such the meeting might be called, of the James Boys' bandits, under the leadership of the great Jesse James himself, had lasted just twenty minutes.

Two minutes after it ended not one of them was in sight of the knoll in the old field on which they met.

They had vanished, each to go his own way and follow his own sweet will till midnight of the following Sunday, when they were all to meet at the old mill in another part of the county.

Jesse James rode away in the direction of the main highway. On reaching that he turned his horse's head in the direction of Kearney, and started off in a brisk canter.

He was going there to see old Dr. Gray and to look up Hal Haynes, the wily detective who had been sent against him.

Old Dr. Gray had been, at one time during the war, a surgeon in Quantrell's command. By some strange freak, the lawless characters under that infamous leader took a liking to him.

When the James Boys became bandits, through the vengeful determination of the loyal people to destroy all of that band of marauders, they did not hesitate to visit the doctor in disguise, when in need of their services, and let him know who they were.

He never betrayed them, and his niece, Sallie Gray, also shared their confidence. They made her lavish presents when flush, and paid her uncle better fees than any other patients he had.

To avoid any attention from neighbors, the doctor had given each member of the band a key to his stable so he could ride into town at night and put up his horse without attracting any attention. There was always hay enough up in the loft to afford a good bed whenever they came there. It was thus with Jesse James when he reached the little town. He put his horse, the famous Siroc, in a stall at

three o'clock in the morning, and then climbed up the ladder that led to the loft, and went to sleep on the hay.

He slept four hours and then awoke to find the sunshine streaming in through the little window at the gable end of the barn.

Taking a small pocket-mirror from his coat pocket, he hung it on a nail in one of the stalls, and proceeded to make some alterations in his make-up.

Just as he had finished he heard a slight cough on the outside, as though one had made an effort to suppress it.

He knew that no one could peep through any crevice on the street side of the stable, so did not have any uneasiness on that account.

Yet he was not one to neglect finding out who was thus so near to him under such circumstances. So he finished his disguise and passed out into the stable yard.

A moment later he saw a man peering over the fence at him.

He seemed to be a man with no particular occupation or object in life, so far as Jesse could make out.

"Want to hire a man?" the stranger asked.

"No," replied Jesse. "I'm trying to get a job myself."

"Know anybody who does?"

"I heard that Martin wanted a few good men."

"Who is Martin?"

"The man who keeps the hotel."

The man seemed incredulous, for he stood there and looked at Jesse as he pumped a pail of water to take to his horse.

When he had watered the black horse he came out and found the man still there.

"Do you really want a job?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Why don't you go see Martin, then?"

"Because I have already seen him," the man said.

"What did he say?"

"Said he didn't want anybody."

"Why, that's strange."

"That's what he said, anyhow."

"When?"

"This morning."

"You must have struck him early."

"Yes, I did. He's an early bird, but I wasn't the worm he was after."

"Well, I heard several days ago that he wanted a dozen good men," said Jesse. "I don't know of any one else who wants any help."

The man looked listlessly around and then asked:

"Do you live here?"

"I am here looking for a job, and attend to the doctor's stable for my board."

"Well, that's half a job anyhow."

"Yes, so it is, but there's no money in it for me. If I can get a place you can have this one," and Jesse looked up toward the house as he spoke, as if anxious for the man to leave. Then he got a rake and went to work about the yard, to keep up the character he had assumed.

The man stood there and looked on in silence for nearly a half hour, and then Jesse put the rake away and locked the stable door. Without a word to the man he went up to the house and entered the kitchen.

The doctor's niece, Miss Sallie Gray, was there.

She looked inquiringly at him and he made her a quick sign with his fingers, and a smile came into her face.

"Oh, is it you?" she said.

"Yes. Is your uncle at home?"

"No. He has gone to see Mr. Rawson; he is very sick."

"Sorry to hear it."

"Yes. Sit down. He may be back in an hour or so. Will you go into the house or stay here?"

"I'll walk round to the hotel and come back after a while. May I go through the house and out the front way?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"Thanks. If he returns before I do please tell him to wait for me."

"Yes."

Jesse went to the kitchen window and found the fellow still leaning against the fence and gazing listlessly about him.

"I am suspicious of you, my good fellow," he said. "If you are not all right the doctor is being watched, and I haven't come here any too soon to see about it."

He then passed through the house from the kitchen and passed out of the front door into the street.

The doctor had his office at his residence and many people called on him there, hence no one would be noticed going or coming.

Out on the street, Jesse hastened to the hotel to see the landlord.

He found that individual in the office, and taking him aside, said:

"Landlord, I want to inquire if a man came to you this morning asking for work?"

"Nobody has come to me for work to-day, or this week even," the landlord replied. "Did any one say he had?"

"Yes, and I wanted to know if he told the truth."

"Well, he didn't."

"Just what I thought," and Jesse asked the landlord to drink with him, which he did.

The bandit chief left the hotel and went leisurely down the street.

He made the circuit of the block and got round to the stable again.

The man in search of work was still there, leaning against the fence across the street.

"The fellow is a shadow," muttered the highwayman, "and I have got to keep an eye on him. He undoubtedly is waiting to see who goes out on the black horse. I'll go up to the house and see if the doctor has come in," and he did so.

The doctor had returned, and he and the bandit chief had a conference together for nearly an hour.

"We can't afford to have a leak anywhere," Jesse said to him in low tones. "Only you and Sallie knew of my visit here last week, and yet the governor of the State heard of it. Now who let it out?"

"I am sure I don't know, Jesse," the doctor replied.

"It lies between you and Sallie. I don't believe you would throw us over. It would not pay you to do so. But it is quite different with her." /

"How so?"

"She has different interests perhaps."

"No," and the doctor shook his head.

"She has a lover, has she not?"

"No."

"I hear that she has."

"I know of none."

"She has, and a woman is true to her lover first and to other people afterward," Jesse remarked.

"Yes, that is true. I will look into the matter and see if she has a sweetheart. Sallie is a good girl and I don't think she would have a lover without my knowledge."

"Women are queer creatures, doctor."

"Yes, so they are, and so are some men."

"Yes, that is true. It is also true that your stable is shadowed."

"Eh! What?"

"A man has been watching your stable all day, and is doing so yet."

"Dear me!" and the old doctor grew nervous and pale. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes. He is evidently waiting to see who rides the black horse from the stable. I want to leave here to-night. You must ride Siroc out of town and leave him in the woods near Howard's spring just outside the limits. I'll keep him from following you, and then go out myself."

"Yes, that's a good way. But are you sure he is shadowing the stable?"

"Yes. I am experienced in that sort of thing, you know."

"You ought to be if you ain't."

"True. Just go down to the stable yard and look over the fence

and you'll see him. But be careful and don't let him see that you are taking any notice of him."

The doctor did as Jesse suggested, and came back to the house to tell him he had seen the fellow.

While the doctor was gone Jesse went down into the dining-room and told Sallie that his visit to Kearney the week before had leaked out.

"And only you and your uncle knew of it," he added.

"How do you know that?" she asked. "There are many people in Kearney who know you."

"True; but none knew me that day," he replied. "I was too well made up for that."

"Then I suppose you think I must have told somebody about it?" and she looked him full in the face as she spoke.

"It looks that way, Sallie."

Her eyes flashed and she drew herself up to her full height.

"I don't mean to say you did so intentionally," he explained. "One's lover can draw many little admissions from——"

"Lover! What do you mean?"

It was a prompt and bold query and had the ring of innocence about it. Yet a telltale blush suffused her face, and Jesse knew he had hit the mark.

"I mean that you have let your sweetheart know something about my visit here," Jesse answered her.

"I haven't any sweetheart."

"Excuse me, Sallie. I know all, but I find that your uncle does not. You do wrong not to let your uncle know of it that he may advise you as to what is best for you."

"I am old enough to manage my own affairs," said she, with no little degree of haughty bearing, "and I won't have my actions spied upon by you, Jesse James."

"Don't get angry now, Sallie," said he, laying a hand on her arm. "I came here to find out how it happened that my visit was known of. We pay your uncle \$500 a month to do our practice, and that's about all he does. Any little carelessness on your part would lose him that practice. I am sure you would not like to see him lose his income."

Just then the doctor came in and found Sallie in great confusion.

"You were right, Jesse. The man is shadowing the stable."

Jesse gave Sallie a look of scrutinizing inquiry.

She returned it defiantly, and then looking up at her uncle said:

"He accuses me of betraying him, uncle."

"And I say I don't believe you have, dear. You would not do such a thing. You are incapable of deceiving me."

"You do me an injustice, Sallie," Jesse said, very coolly. "I told you I did not believe you had done so intentionally, and yet you seek to make him believe I had accused you of being a traitress. Not one of us will ever come here again," and he turned on his heel and went up to the front room again.

"Sallie, you have ruined me!" groaned the old doctor, sinking into a chair and looking the picture of despair.

"I have done nothing, uncle. It is all his imagination. I'll go and tell him so," and she ran up-stairs to the parlor where Jesse had gone. Then she went up to him, her face as white as a sheet and eyes flashing, laid her hand on his arm and said:

"You are a brute and a coward, Jesse James! Your cruel suspicion has driven me from the only home I have on earth. I am going away so as to leave you and your friends free to come and go as you always have done."

"Did the doctor tell you to go?" Jesse asked her.

"No, nor does he know that I am going. I love him too well to stand in the way of his interest. I have never by word, look or action given any one a hint that any one of your friends ever came here."

"But you have a lover, and——"

"Must I ask your consent to have one?" she asked, quickly, not waiting to hear him finish.

"No, but——"

"Excuse me, please. I shall leave to-morrow and will never cross

this threshold again as long as you and your friends are uncle's patients," and she turned and left the room.

The doctor came in just as she left, and Jesse said:

"She is very hard on me," and then he told him what she had said.

"Leave me!" Sallie leave me!" he groaned. "I—I—can't let her go, Jesse! I couldn't do without her. I'd have to hire another housekeeper, and——"

"I don't want her to go and didn't ask her to do so. Tell her it's all right and that I beg her pardon."

The old doctor ran up to Sallie's room and found her in tears.

He told her what Jesse had said, and begged her not to leave him.

"But will they still be your patients, doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, of course they will."

"Then I won't go."

The old doctor was delighted. He ran down-stairs to Jesse James again, and told him that it was all right.

"But look out and see who her lover is," Jesse said, "and then we can see what we are doing."

"I will attend to that."

The afternoon wore on and the sun went down. Jesse went out to the stable and found the man still out in the street, near the stable.

At about nine o'clock he saddled Siroc, and the doctor mounted him and rode out. The man undertook to follow him, but Jesse went along with him. The man tried to shake him off, but Jesse kept right behind him, his hand on his revolver.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE CASE OF SALLIE GRAY.

Jesse James followed the unknown shadow close at his heels till they were well on the outskirts of the town.

There the man turned on him and hissed:

"If you follow me another step I'll blow out your brains!"

"Hal Haynes, I have the drop on you!" Jesse replied, very coolly.

The man staggered as if stricken a hard blow.

"My name ain't Haynes, and——"

"Hands up, or down you go!" and Jesse held his revolver within three feet of the man's breast.

Up went his hands.

"Now turn and follow that black horse!" Jesse ordered.

He obeyed.

"Keep your hands up."

They trotted along the road and were making a bee-line for the spring where Jesse was to find Siroc waiting for him, when a fierce mastiff came bounding out of a gate which had been left open by some careless person and sprang upon the prisoner.

The man grappled with the dog, and the two rolled on the ground together.

Quick as a flash Jesse darted away, thinking it would be better to have the dog finish him than to get the old doctor into any trouble.

When safely out of the way, Jesse heard two shots, and yelps of pain from the dog.

"He has shot the dog," he muttered, as he hurried on toward the spring. "I was hoping the dog would kill him, and maybe he has almost. Ah! Doctor! Go back through the woods. Somebody's dog has attacked him and you may be sent for."

Jesse sprang into the saddle and rode away, leaving the old doctor standing by the spring. The physician was familiar with every foot of ground about him, and was soon wending his way homeward by another path.

In the meantime the owner of the dog had run out into the road to call him off the man who had been attacked.

Just as he reached the middle of the road he saw a flash, heard a report, and his dog yelp, and knew his splendid animal had been shot.

The dog rolled in the dust of the road, and the man rose to his feet and fired the second time.

"Hold on! Don't shoot him again!" he cried out.

"Why not?" the victim asked.

"Because it's no use. He isn't troubling you now."

"Well, I hope he'll never be able to trouble anybody again. He has nearly killed me. Was he your dog?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll hold you responsible for his attack on me."

"He is dead," said the owner, very sorrowfully.

"Yes, and so ought the man be who keeps such beasts unchained about his place."

"I have a right to keep a dog if I want to, sir."

"Yes, so you have. You have the right to keep tigers and rattlesnakes, too, but not in the way that endangers the lives of other people."

The man made no reply, but turned and went back into the house, offering no assistance, or even apology to the man who had been badly torn by the dog.

"You are no better than your dog," sung out the man as he turned to make his way back to the hotel where he was stopping.

There his story of the battle with the mastiff created a sensation among the guests and villagers.

"Tom Williams has no right to keep such a dog," said one of the townsmen present.

"No. The dog ought to be killed," put in another.

"The dog is dead," said the wounded man.

"Ah! Here's Dr. Gray!" exclaimed some one as the old doctor entered the hotel. "You are just in time, doctor!"

"How! What's the matter?" the doctor asked.

"Here's a man who has been bitten by Tom Williams' big dog."

The doctor looked at the man and recognized him as the man who had been shadowing his stable all the day and evening.

"You have had a narrow escape, sir," he said. "Shall I dress your wounds for you?"

"Are you a doctor?" the man asked.

"Yes, I am a physician."

"Well, I'd like to have you fix me up. Come up to my room," and he led the way up-stairs to his room.

He had registered there as Joe Coleman, of St. Joe, and the landlord followed him and the doctor up to his room.

"Do you need any help, doctor?" the landlord asked. "Mr. Coleman has been here a week and I am sorry to see him so badly hurt."

"Send me up a pitcher of hot water as quick as you can," the doctor replied as he threw off his coat.

The old doctor dressed his hurts very carefully and said he didn't think there was any danger of rabies.

"He was a fierce dog," said Coleman. "I'd as soon have a full grown bear or panther attack me any time than a dog like that. But I killed him and I'd like to serve his owner the same way."

A dozen men went out to see if the dog was really dead, and found him lying in the road very dead indeed.

Williams was told that he would get into trouble on the dog's account and that alarmed him.

"Tell him I'll pay the doctor's bill," he said to one of the men.

"If you don't do better than that he'll push the law on you," said one.

Nobody liked Williams, and every one in the crowd wanted to see him mulcted in heavy damages.

In a few days he was out again, but had some very sore spots on him. Fortunately his face had escaped being torn by the dog's fangs, so he managed to look all right.

"Dr. Gray, send me your bill," he said to the old doctor on the fourth day after the affair, "and make it out for as much as you can. I am going to make Williams pay it."

"How will fifty dollars do?" the doctor asked, rubbing his hands.

"Why not make it one hundred?"

"He'd kick and wouldn't pay it."

"Then I'd sue him for damages and make him pay five hundred."

"And I'd have to wait about two years for my money," returned the doctor.

"I'll pay you fifty dollars if he refuses to pay you the one hundred dollars, so you won't have to wait."

"I'll do it," and he made out the bill for one hundred, sent it to Coleman, who wrote on the back of it, "referred to Mr. Joe Williams," and signed his name to it.

The doctor took it to Williams.

"I won't pay it!" exclaimed Williams, "nor the half of it. It's an outrageous gouge. You can't gouge me, Dr. Gray," and he shook his head in a very determined manner.

"That's all right, Williams," said the doctor. "The bill is made out against Mr. Coleman, and he told me that a dozen men will swear that you sent word to him that you would pay the bill."

"Well, I didn't mean by that to say I would pay more than what was right. Why, twenty dollars would be a big charge, and you know it. You never did charge more than two dollars a visit, and——"

"That's for sick calls, not dog bites," said the doctor, interrupting him.

"Dog bites or flea bites, you can bite me with no such bill as that."

"Shall I tell Coleman you refuse to pay the bill?"

"You can tell him I won't pay one hundred dollars."

"Very well. I told him I thought you wouldn't pay it, and he said if you didn't he would, and then sue you for one thousand dollars damages. Every man in this town is down on you, and a jury would give him every cent he asked for."

Williams turned pale and glared at the doctor like a wolf at bay.

"Did he say that?"

"He did."

"Well, he's got me. But you've got to cut it down to twenty dollars."

"Why should I when he'll pay me one hundred?"

"Because I've got you as badly as he has me."

"Got me?"

"Yes, you, Dock Gray."

The doctor sneered and said:

"You talk like a fool, Joe Williams."

"Do I?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I tell you that I know every time one of the James Boys' gang comes to your house, you wouldn't say I talked like a fool, would you?"

"No. I'd say you talked like a liar," the doctor replied; but his face was white as a sheet.

"Then I'll give you and the public the proof of it. Jesse James was at your house nearly all that day, and you rode his black horse out to the spring for him that night. Ah! I see you weaken. Just receipt that bill and I'll pay you twenty dollars. But you can tell Coleman I paid you one hundred dollars," and he pulled out his purse and paid the doctor twenty dollars.

"That's all right, Williams," the doctor said, as he put the money into his pocket.

"Just receipt this bill, please."

He did so, saying:

"I'd like to know how you know so much."

"Yes, I reckon you would. I know a blamed sight more than you think I do, but you don't hear me going round town and blowing, do you?"

"No."

"Of course not. Just go on with your game, but don't play it on me. I won't have it."

"You won't say anything about it?"

"Have I?"

"I don't know, but——"

"Of course you don't. I ain't an old woman to go round and tell folks all I know," and he turned away, leaving the doctor to do as he pleased.

The old doctor was staggered.

Here was a mystery.

Jesse James had accused his niece of giving secrets away, and here was one who knew as much as Sallie did of the coming and going of members of the band.

"I can't understand it," he muttered, as he made his way back to the hotel. "I can't understand it. Sallie isn't acquainted with him even. I must tell Jesse about it the next time I see him. I don't believe he is the only one who knows. How did he know I rode Siroc out to the spring? He was in the house when the dog attacked Coleman and ran out to call him off. It's strange—very strange. I can't understand it."

When he reached the hotel he told Coleman that Williams had paid the bill.

"Well, I'm glad of that," Coleman said.

"So am I," chimed in the landlord. "It was better than I expected of him, though."

"Yes," assented the doctor. "He kicked at first, but finally paid it."

The doctor then hastened home and had a talk with his niece.

"Sallie, Joe Williams knows all about Jesse and his boys coming here. How does he find it out?"

"Does he really know, uncle?" she asked.

"Yes, he does," and he told her what Williams had said to him that afternoon.

She turned pale and said:

"I am sure I don't know how he finds it out, uncle."

"You never hint it to any one of your girl friends?"

"No, uncle."

"Nor to any male friend or sweetheart?"

"No, I have no sweetheart."

Yet she was as pale as death all the time she was talking to her uncle.

"What's the matter? Why are you so pale, Sallie?" the doctor asked.

"I don't know, uncle. I am frightened almost to death."

"What are you frightened about, dear? Tell me. No one can make you afraid when I am here to protect you."

"I—I—don't know, uncle. I am afraid I am not well. I don't feel right at all."

"Let me feel your pulse, my child," and he took her unresisting hand and examined her pulse.

"You are quite feverish and very much excited. You need rest. Go up to your room and take a nap. You'll feel better after that. The housework can wait."

"But I think I ought to tell you that I have a strange dream every night of late, uncle," she said. "I dream that every night I go out on the street and meet a young man and walk with him. He asks me all sorts of questions about the James Boys, and I have to tell him all I know. I try not to, but he gets it out of me just the same. Then he kisses me and sends me back home. I always wake up and find I have been dreaming all the time. But I dream of the same man every time, and I don't know that I have ever seen him while I am awake."

"Well, it is strange," the doctor said. "I can't understand it. I'll look through my books and see if I can find anything on the subject. Go and lie down now, dear, and let the house take care of itself," and she did as he told her.

The old doctor ran his hand over his partially bald head, and then across his eyes, as if trying to get his bearing or wake himself up.

"I believe I am dreaming myself," he muttered to himself. "There's something wrong about this, and I am unable to see what it is. I'm afraid I'm getting rattled," and he gazed out of the window in a dazed sort of way.

"Joe Williams isn't what might be called a smart man. He is more noted for looking out for number one than for anything else. I can't see why he paid me twenty dollars on that bill when he could just as well hold me up for the whole amount. I wish Jesse would come in again. I must see and tell him about this. But he won't

take any stock in Sallie's dreams. Jesse is a very hard-headed, matter-of-fact sort of fellow," and he kept on gazing out of the window in a dreamy way.

"How strange she should have such dreams, and always meeting the same man, too. And he never fails to ask her about the James Boys. I'll keep a watch on her hereafter, and see if she walks in her sleep. I never knew her to, and—but pshaw! I can't sit up of nights to watch her or any one else. I'll have to get somebody to do that for me. But it won't do to get any one who lives in Kearney. People will talk, and when Kearney people begin to talk, they never know when to stop. I'll wait till I see Jesse and get him to send over one of his men to watch her and the whole place.

"There's some mystery about this whole business that puzzles me. That fellow Coleman isn't what he appears to be. He is a deep fellow, and has eyes that have more power in them than any I have ever seen. Jesse thinks he is a spy for a detective, or else a real detective himself, and I guess he knows a good deal about such things."

Quite late in the afternoon Sallie came down to her uncle's study again, and said she felt much better, and was standing by his chair when she saw Coleman going by out on the street, accompanied by Martin, the landlord of the hotel.

"Oh, uncle!" she gasped. "There he goes—with Mr. Martin."

"Who—who is he?"

"The man I met in my dream! He is the same man!"

"Why that is Coleman, the man who was bitten by Williams' dog."

"Well, he is the man!" and she sank down in a chair in a state of nervous prostration.

Coleman and Martin had passed out of sight, and Sallie seemed utterly overcome.

The doctor gave her soothing potions, and then removed her to her room again, forcing her to retire and rest.

In a little while she came down again, much to his surprise, and he noticed that she had a queer look in her eyes. She was going out when he caught and forcibly detained her.

She did not say a word, but tried to release herself from his grasp. He held her all the more securely, and led her to her room again.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE OLD WELL.

When he mounted Siroc at the spring where old Dr. Gray had taken him, Jesse James lost no time in getting away from that vicinity. The stars were shining in a clear sky and the road was broad and in good repair.

"On! on, Siroc!" he said to the black horse, and the splendid animal went like the wind.

Farm-house after farm-house was passed, and people wondered who the wild horseman was. Ere one could reach his door to look out the sounds of the horse's hoof were in the distance.

Ten miles away he halted and Siroc had a breathing spell.

Then he rode leisurely along till he struck the river road, which he followed till he reached McCoomb's Landing, where he met Jim Cummins.

Jesse and Jim rode over into the next county and kept hid at a farm-house for three days.

On the third day a posse came up and stopped there for dinner.

Jesse and Jim were up-stairs in a bedroom at the time and heard the sheriff and his men talking.

The dinner over, the sheriff displayed a big wad of bills when he paid for the meals for the posse.

The farmer's wife ran up-stairs and told them that the sheriff had a big pile of money with him.

"If I keep him here till the others go on ahead will you hold him up and give me half of it?"

"Yes," replied Jesse; "but get him where he can't see us go to the barn, for it would ruin you to let it get out that we were here at the time."

"I'll get him out in the back yard," she said, and went down again.

They were all mounted but the sheriff.

"Tell 'em to go on," she said to him, "and come back. I've got something to send to your wife."

"Ride on, boys—I'll overtake you!" sung out the sheriff, and the score of horsemen rode off up the road.

She led him out to the rear of the premises and showed him about twenty patent bee-hives all filled with honey.

"The honey is packed in little glass boxes, holding about one pound each," she said to him.

"Packed by the bees?" he asked.

"Yes, and as neatly as the best packer could do it. I want to send your wife a couple of them, for I know she'll appreciate them."

"She will, indeed, and I am very grateful to you for the present. When I reach home I'll send one of my boys over for them with a wagon."

By this time Jesse and Jim had gone to the barn, saddled their horses, and ridden up the road, where they hid in the woods to wait for the sheriff.

The sheriff came along in a few minutes.

Jesse and Jim dashed out into the middle of the road and held him up.

"Glad to see you, sheriff," Jesse said.

"Well, I'm not glad to see you," the sheriff replied.

"Why, that's strange! I heard you were riding all over the country looking for me."

"I was, but you notice that I didn't find you."

"Yes. You never find me. I have to hunt you up when I want to see you. Got any cash about you to-day?"

"Very little," and he started to reach for his wallet.

"Hold up your hands!" sternly ordered Jesse, "or I'll put a bullet through you!"

"I—I—was going to give you my money."

"Yes, but we always search for it ourselves," Jesse explained. "Jim, see what he has got."

Jim rode up alongside of him and searched his pockets. He found the big wad that had so excited the farmer's wife's cupidity.

The sheriff groaned as he saw his wealth go.

"It's hard," said Jesse, "but you may have the pleasure of getting even with me some day. Who knows but you may hang me yet?"

"I hope so," the sheriff said.

"Of course. I don't blame you. But let me tell you that you'll never get me with a posse. They are bunglers always."

"How can I catch you then?"

"Just sprinkle salt on my coat tails and I'll surrender at once."

Jim roared, and the sheriff turned very red in the face, saying:

"That's no joke."

"I didn't intend it for one," Jesse returned. "But there's a lesson in it for you. You had better ride on now and overtake your posse. If I were you I wouldn't say we had held you up, for the whole State would laugh at you if you do."

"I won't say a word about it."

He rode off and Jesse and Jim counted over the money he had yielded up.

"Eight hundred and ten dollars in cold cash," said Jim.

"Eight hundred and ten dollars even," Jesse said to him. "She loves money more than she loves her husband."

They rode back to the house and Jim gave her the money, saying:

"It's your share and a little over."

The sheriff submitted to his loss in silence. He never let the public know of it, nor did he ever suspect the wife of the farmer at whose house his posse stopped for dinner that day.

But he vowed in his wrath if ever Jesse James fell into his hands he should never see the inside of a jail.

"I'll hang him to the nearest tree!" he hissed, as he rode along the road to overtake his friends.

Jesse and Jim paid the farmer liberally for the services rendered by him and his wife.

"Come again, Jesse," she said. "You'll always be welcome."

"If that posse comes back tell 'em you saw a man on a black horse go by, making for the river."

"Yes," they both said.

"Now, Jim, we have to reach the old well at midnight," the bandit chief said, "so hurry up," and they both rode fast for many miles.

The old well was on a deserted farm among the hills on the south side of Bear Creek. It was near the foot of a bold range of hills, about one hundred yards from the house, which was still left standing.

Precisely at midnight the bandits appeared at the well.

They shook hands with the chief to give him the grip. Each having a different grip, the chief called him by name as soon as he felt it.

"Let's have a drink of water first," Jesse suggested. "Who has the tube? I have left mine at Bailey's."

"I have mine," said Bob Younger, as he drew a coil of small rubber tubing from one of his pockets.

Each bandit generally carried one with him to use when on horseback or when they struck a well or spring where no bucket or dipper was at hand. By dropping one end of the tube in the water one could suck up all he wanted like a boy with a straw in the bunghole of a cider barrel.

Jesse took the coil and let one end fall down to the water in the well some ten or twelve feet below the surface.

He was holding the other end in his mouth and using his suction power, when the tube was violently jerked from his hand.

"Hello!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" Cole Younger asked.

"It was jerked out of my hand."

"The deuce!"

"Yes."

"What could have done it?"

"That's what I want to know."

"Throw a light down there."

Jim Younger produced his dark lantern and flashed a ray of light down into the well.

On the side next the hills there was a cave-in, which made a yawning gap in the walls of the well.

It reached down to the water.

"That's a good place for a spy to hide in," Wood Hite remarked.

"Yes," said Jesse; "but a spy wouldn't be such a fool as to let us know he was there, would he?"

"Of course not," Cole Younger put in.

"No," said Cummins.

"What was it then?" Frank asked.

"Hanged if I know."

"Hush-sh! Listen," and they all held their breath as certain sounds came up from the well.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sepulchral laugh, followed by a snatch of a song.

Jesse James snatched his lantern from Bob's hand, and flashed a ray of light down into the well again.

He could only see the placid water and the cave-in on the south side of the well.

"Oh, if Jesse James would only come and join us!" exclaimed a voice that seemed to come from the deepest recesses of the infernal regions.

Jesse was staggered.

"This gets away with me completely," he said.

"Yes," said Frank, "and I am going to——"

"And all the James Boys," came up from the well. "What a home this would be for them!"

"Yes, and they'd never complain of cold here."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Frank. "That's Hades as sure as you live! I'm off!" and he made a break for his horse.

"Hold on!" sternly ordered Jesse.

Frank stopped.

"Wait till we are all ready to go," Jesse said, and then they gathered around him.

"You are to go with me from here," he continued. "I have business mapped out for to-morrow. Now, you can mount."

"Now, old King Cole is a jolly old soul,
A jolly old soul is he,
He lights his pipe with a red-hot coal,
And drinks hot lead for tea."

They heard every word of the song as it came up from the well, as if from the depth of a mile or so.

"Lord, let's get away from here!" said Frank. "They'll come up after us if we don't," and he made a break for his horse. The others followed suit, and they were soon in the saddle, following the lead of their chief.

Some five miles away Jesse stopped and said as they gathered around him:

"We are going to hold up the St. Louis express train at Ennis station at daylight."

"That's risky, Jesse," said Cole Younger.

"Yes, so it is; but the prize is worth the risk," he replied.

"What is the prize?"

"A \$200,000 express shipment."

"That's \$20,000 apiece for us."

"Yes, and we may rake in several thousand from the passengers. That settled it and they turned and rode on.

But they did not forget the strange happenings at the old well.

"I can't understand it," Jesse said to Cole Younger. "We have met there for over four years and never heard anything unusual before."

"I am worse puzzled than ever before in my life," Cole replied. "and Frank has just gone to pieces over it."

"Oh, Frank always was superstitious. He believes in ghosts and goblins as much as any old negro."

"Yes, I know. But the others are a little that way, too."

"All men are, more or less. But I never take any stock in the supernatural."

"How do you account for this thing at the well, then?"

"I don't account for it at all."

"You don't."

"No."

"What do you think of it, then?"

"I think it very strange."

"Of course. But do you believe anybody had anything to do with it?"

"Yes."

"Eh? You do?"

"Yes."

"Live men?"

"Of course. Dead men never do anything, do they?"

"No, but——"

"Hold up, Cole!" Jesse interrupted him. "Don't try to reason as Frank does. When a man is dead that's the last of him. If he lives again it's in another world, and he stays there. Put that in your pipe and smoke it as true theology, and let all this supernatural go to the winds. Only niggers and white fools believe in it."

"Well, it's a mystery to me."

"So it is to me. The world is full of mysteries. But time unravels many of them. Some day we'll unravel this one of the old well."

"I hope so, as this knocks me out of my reckoning."

"It does, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is just like a sleight of hand trick to me. I've seen 'em in shows, but couldn't understand how they were done. But I knew they were tricks just the same.

Cole rode on by his side and the others came up in the rear.

"We are near Ennis station," the bandit chief said after they had noticed the gray streaks of coming dawn in the eastern horizon. "We are to hold up the agent first and make him signal the train to stop. Four of us, Cole, Jim, myself and Wood, will take charge of the express car. The rest of you look after the passengers. Come on!" and he rode on toward the station.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOLD UP AT ENNIS STATION.

The agent at Ennis station had just opened the doors of the little depot, when he saw ten men approaching.

There was nothing about them to excite his suspicion.

He saw one of them look at his watch in the light of the lamp just to the right of the door, and say:

"We have twenty minutes yet."

"The express doesn't stop here," the agent said to him.

"It is going to stop here this morning."

Jesse drew his revolver as he spoke.

"You'll stop that train or stop a half dozen bullets. Take your choice."

Each bandit, including Jesse, lowered a black mask over his face from the inside of his hat.

"You—are—Jesse James?"

"Yes."

"I'll stop it."

"Very well. That will save your life."

He got a colored lamp and said:

"I'll stop it."

In a little while they heard the roar of the train in the distance.

They got into positions and waited for the train to appear.

When the headlight appeared a mile away the agent began his danger signals, and the whistle called for "down brakes!"

It came to a full stop at the station.

Jim Younger sprang upon the engine and covered the engineer and fireman with a revolver in each hand.

"Jesse James, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the engineer.

"Yes, and you want to keep quiet," said the bandit.

Jesse and the others took charge of the express car.

The messenger was dozing when they entered the car.

A revolver at his head and four masked men about him was what greeted him when he opened his eyes.

"Open that strong box!" ordered Jesse.

"I can't."

"You can't?"

"No."

"Why can't you?"

"I have no key."

"Where is the key?"

"The agents at the two ends of the line have keys to fit it. The messengers never have a key to that box."

"Tumble the box out, then, boys."

They tumbled it out on to the platform of the little station.

In the meantime women were screaming in their berths in the sleepers and men swearing.

Jesse gave a call and every bandit left the train.

"Go on, engineer!" he sung out, and the whistle tooted as the train started off.

Crack!

Somebody fired from a car window and the bullet passed through Jesse James' hat, knocking it from his head.

Quick as a flash he fired at the window, and a woman uttered a piercing scream.

The next moment the train had moved out of range.

"Get an ax, agent—two of 'em!" the chief ordered, and the trembling agent obeyed.

"Knock it open, boys."

Jim and Wood seized each an ax and began to rain blows on the strong, iron-bound box.

It withstood the blows for some minutes, but yielded at last.

It was opened.

In a large tin box they found the \$200,000 they were in search of.

"Bring the box along," said Jesse.

Jim Cummins took up the box and hurried away toward his horse with it.

The others followed, and in a few minutes were out of sight of the station.

"Push on, boys; the telegraph can rouse the neighborhood in a few hours," Jesse said to them, and then he dashed on up the road for four miles.

At that point he turned into a lane and rode a mile at full speed.

Then the lane ended in a small settlement road which ran through a great stretch of wooded country, with here and there a swamp.

It was very sparsely settled through that section, and they rode sometimes for three miles without passing a house.

When they had gone a good distance in that direction Jesse called a halt and ordered them into the woods.

Under an immense oak they sat down on the ground, and had a division of the spoils secured on the train.

In the tin box carried by Jim Cummins they found \$200,000.

The others had obtained \$8,000 in cash from the passengers, and over twenty gold watches, quite a number of fine diamonds, and other bits of jewelry.

They divided the cash easily enough; but it took more time to make an equal distribution of the watches and jewelry, as they did not know much about the value of such things.

When it was done, however, they all took their share, shook hands with each other, and saw it was the best job they had ever struck.

"The whole country will now be aroused," Jesse James said, "and we will have to be very careful. The posses will be out all over this part of the State, and the express company will offer big rewards and send the best detectives against us."

"We must push on and see if we can find any place where we can hide safely for a few days," Jesse added. "If we can keep hid so they can't tell which way we have gone, they will all be puzzled and think we have left the State."

They rode on for another mile, and Cole Younger suggested that they go to the cave on the river side under the Chalk Bluffs.

"No. All our old haunts will be watched for weeks after this," Jesse replied. "We must keep away from them. That'll make 'em think we have gone from the State."

By and by they came in sight of a large farm-house, with big barns and quite a number of out-houses.

"Hello! This is a big farm in the midst of a great wilderness," Jesse said, as he gazed at the place.

"Yes, but it hasn't been cultivated much since the war," said Cole Younger.

"Somebody lives there, though."

"Yes. There's a dozen children at least."

"Well, let's see if we can get dinner here and find out where we are. Hello! There goes two—three men for the woods with guns in their hands."

"Yes, and they are Winchesters, too," said Bob.

Jesse and Cole dismounted and went up to the door of the house.

It had once been a fine farm-house.

"Hello!" called Jesse, as he saw an elderly woman, surrounded by six younger women and eight or ten children.

"Wal?" answered the old woman.

"Can we get any dinner for pay?"

"We hain't got anything but corn bread and bacon," she replied, in a puzzled sort of way.

"That'll do, ma'am. That's good enough."

"You ain't the sheriff, air you?"

"Why, no. I'm trying to dodge the sheriff. Why do you ask?"

"'Cause my old man an' the boys make moonshine liquor, and——"

"Ah, I am glad to hear that. I am Jesse James. Just call the old man and the boys back, and we'll help him take care of any sheriff that may come along."

One of the girls, a strapping big blonde, ran out on the piazza in the rear of the house and blew two short, sharp blasts on a horn.

Then she came in with a pleased look on her face.

A few minutes later the old man and his two boys came back from the woods.

"Hello, old moonshiner!" Jesse James greeted him. "What's you running from? Jesse James is your friend."

"Yes, by jingo!" and the old man shook his hand heartily. "Them's my boys," and the two youths shook hands with the bandit chief.

The eldest boy was not more than twenty, and the other but eighteen years old. Yet both were married. The big blonde who blew the horn was the wife of the younger one, and she was at least ten years older than her boy husband.

The other boy's wife was a plump, black-eyed girl about his own age, and she had a two-year-old baby.

The others were children of the old couple, four of whom were girls of marriageable age, and were robust, healthy looking pieces of femininity.

"Wal, I'm glad ter see yer," the old man said, as the others dismounted and came in.

"We are looking for a safe place to stop for a week or two," Jesse said, "and if you can take care of us for awhile we'll pay you \$100 a day."

"Why, blame my cats!" gasped the old man, "I'd take keer on the whole county for that money. The ole woman an' ther girls kin fix things for ye, I reckon."

"That we can," said one of the "gals," a bright-eyed, snappy girl of some twenty-two years.

"We ain't got nothin' but corn-bread an' bacon, though," the old man said.

"That's good enough. Are you raising these children on that sort of fare?"

"Yes."

"Well, they're the best looking lot of children I ever saw, and the older they get the prettier they are."

The four girls blushed and seemed to feel proud of the compliment.

The old woman at once went about preparing the dinner for the bandits, and Jesse and the old man went aside for a talk.

The bandit chief knew how the moonshiners hated the government and all officers of the law.

He did not hesitate to tell the old man that he had held up a train at Ennis station that morning, and wanted to hide for a week or two.

"Do you own this place?" he asked the old man.

"No; it's owner's dead, an' I squatted hyer, an' hyer I've been for five year an' nobody hain't come ter put me out."

"Nobody comes this way?"

"No."

"How do you sell your whiskey?"

"Take it to Wildcat Hollow. Bill Mosy buys it all."

"How far is that from here?"

"Seven miles."

"Got any feed for our horses?"

"Got plenty of corn for whiskey. I reckon it won't kill 'em?"

"No."

"An' thar's no end of good pasture round behind yonder piece o' timber," and he pointed toward a piece of woods behind the barn.

"What's your name?"

"Crouch."

Jesse looked at him a few moments and said:

"I know you now."

"Yer do, eh?"

"Yes. They had you in jail once for killing a revenue officer. But they didn't prove it on you."

The old man chuckled and said:

"No, they couldn't prove, but they did prove he was dead, though," and he chuckled again.

"Yes, so they did. I read all about it in the papers. You're a trump, old man," and the bandit chief shook hands with him.

Then they turned their attention to the horses. The big barn was amply large enough for them all, and they were soon in the stalls munching corn.

The bandits then turned their attention to the girls.

Four of them were of marriageable age and one of fourteen seemed to think she should not be counted out, for she was tall, robust and pert—the prettiest one of the lot.

That night they had a dance, and the old house rang with laughter and merry-making.

Bettie Crouch, a strapping, big, muscular girl, who had been selected by Jim Cummins as his particular "mash," asked him to walk out into the yard with her to hear the whippoorwills and look at the stars.

Of course he went, and she led the way to a seat under a spreading oak about fifty yards away from the house.

Jim knew she was trying to give him a chance to make love to her, and he enjoyed the situation.

As they neared the tree they saw a dark form moving rapidly away from it.

"Halt, or I'll fire!" cried Jim.

The man halted and Jim advanced upon him.

Bettie kept alongside of him.

"Hold up your hands!" Jim ordered.

The man sprang at him, and in a moment both were rolling on the ground in a death grapple.

Jim was the bravest of all the bandits.

He did not say a word, but closed with the unknown, like a genuine English bulldog, and didn't make any noise about it.

Bettie didn't scream for help, as nine out of ten women would have done. On the contrary, she grabbed hold of the unknown's leg and began pulling with all her might.

And she could pull like a mule.

R-r-r-rip!

The girl fell backward on the ground.

But she had a pair of trousers in her hands.

She sprang up and tried to get another grip on the man.

But he took to his heels and ran.

Jim sprang to his feet and felt for his weapon.

It had dropped to the ground in the struggle.

"Ten thousand curses!" he hissed. "He has got away."

"Yes," said Bettie. "But I've got his pants," and she held up the trousers for him to look at.

Jim laughed and said she was a brave girl, and he was proud of her.

"But who was he?" he asked.

"I dunno, I'm sure."

"Anybody ever come round here that way before?"

"No."

"Well, Jesse must know of this," and he took the trousers she had held on to so pugnaciously and returned to the house with her.

"Jesse, I've had a set-to with a spy," he said, "and Bettie pulled his pants off in the fight."

"Where?" asked Jesse.

"Out under the big oak in the yard."

Jesse instantly searched the pockets of the trousers.

In one he found a piece of plug tobacco and an ordinary pocket knife.

In the other was a wallet with money and papers in it.

One of the papers was a note for money by Hal Haynes to John Smith—\$300.

"That settles it," said Jesse. "He has dropped on us. The best detective in America, too."

The bandits looked at each other in no little dismay.

The entire family of the big and little Crouches stood around them.

"Just one man?" the old moonshiner asked.

"Yes, but he is more dangerous than all the sheriffs in the State."

"Wal, no one man kin come hyer an' make us afraid."

"We are not afraid of one man," Jesse returned. "It's the fact that our hiding-place is known that worries us."

A little after midnight Wood Hite went out to the barn to relieve Jesse.

He made the signal several times and got no reply.

Then he went round the barn in search of him.

As he turned the corner he was struck on the head and knocked senseless.

When he came to he was lying on the ground minus his trousers.

But he had a lump on his head as big as a walnut.

He sat up, rubbed his head and gradually pulled himself together.

Then he gave the old James Boys' call, and Jesse James came round from the other side of the barn and asked:

"Who is it?"

"It's me—Wood."

"What's the matter, and how long have you been here?"

"I came out to relieve you at the end of two hours, but couldn't find you."

"I was shadowing somebody who got away from me," explained Jesse.

"Somebody knocked me on the head and took my pants off."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, my pants are gone."

"Haynes got 'em, I reckon. I'll see if one of the boys haven't got an extra pair."

"Bring me Haynes' pants."

"Yes, that's so," and Jesse gave a call that brought the old man to the barn.

"Bring the pants your daughter captured. Mr. Hite has lost his," Jesse said to him.

"How'd he lose 'em?"

Jesse explained how it happened.

"Wal, I'll be horn-swaggled!" exclaimed the old moonshiner. "I'd like ter see er man come up an' try ter take the britches offen me—I would, begosh!"

"I don't think he would get mine," remarked Jesse.

"What would you do if he knocked you cold from behind?" Wood asked.

The old man chuckled at the idea of a man getting close enough behind him to crack him on the head, and then went to the house for the other pair of trousers.

When he brought them out Wood put them on and said he had the best of the exchange, with the exception of the lump on his head.

"He is around yet, though," Jesse said, "and we must be on the lookout for him."

"Just let me or Tom draw a bead on 'im," said the old moonshiner, "an' he won't be erround no more."

Jesse decided, however, to put two to guard the horses, and so Jim Cummins came out to keep Wood company.

The night passed without any further incident, and when morning came the bandits were ready for a move.

"Wait an' see ef they come for ye," said the old man.

"It would be too late when forty or fifty armed men get all around us," Jesse replied.

"They can't do it."

"Why not?"

"They've got to come by the road either way, an' when we guard it on both sides we can give 'em warning. Me an' the boys an' gals kin lick fifty on 'em an' not try."

"Did they ever come here to attack you?"

"No. They know better."

"Where did they arrest you?"

"Over ter Wildcat Hollow."

"Well, we'll wait here and see how things turn out," Jesse finally said.

They spent three more days there, and each day Jesse paid the old moonshiner's wife \$100 so as not to leave in her debt in the event of a sudden surprise.

The girls did not waste any time in letting the bandits know that if they were in need of wives they could find them right there. Myra, the young beauty of the family, told Bob that if he left her she'd follow him all over the world.

"No," said he. "Wait here till I come for you. I am getting rich fast, and in a few months, if we have good luck, I'll come back

and take you away to California, where we will settle down and live happily all our lives."

"How long will I have to wait?" she asked.

"Till I come, and that will be as soon as I get \$20,000 more money."

"How much have you got now?"

"Thirty thousand dollars."

"Got it all with you?"

"No."

"Where is it?"

"In a bank."

"It's enough now."

"Oh, no! I want \$50,000."

"Why, that's a big fortune!"

He shook his head, and was about to reply when the sounds of rushing horses' feet fell upon his ear.

He sprang to his feet and gave the alarm, ran to the barn, and, with the other bandits, began to saddle his horse.

Just as he sprang into the saddle a posse of some thirty armed men dashed up to the gate and dismounted.

Crack!

A Winchester in the hands of one of the Crouch family up at the house caused the posse to seek the shelter of the fence.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Cr-r-r-ack!

The whole family were pumping lead and the posse began to scatter and seek the shelter of the woods on the other side of the road.

In the meantime the bandits had pulled down the fence on the east side of the barn and dashed through the opening, making for the road some hundreds of yards below.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The Winchesters kept the posse very busy.

They saw the black horse leading the way across the field to the road, and tried to head them off.

But the moment they left the shelter of the trees they exposed themselves to the fire of the Winchesters, and so several were wounded.

"The girls are peppering them!" cried Bob, who was eager to get a shot at the posse.

"Yes, they are holding 'em up finely. Come on!" and Jesse rode like the wind, the others coming up bravely behind him.

When they struck the road they soon gave vent to their exultation with a wild cheer.

Jesse led the way and in a very few moments they were out of sight.

The firing from the house ceased and the posse remounted and dashed away in hot pursuit, led by a man who seemed to bear a charmed life.

Ten miles away the bandits struck the main road to Kearney.

"Into the woods beyond!" cried Jesse, leading the way, and in a few minutes they were in the thick woods beyond the place where they struck the main highway.

"We'll see which way they go," he said, as they sat on their horses and waited for their pursuers to appear. "They can't follow our trail in that road. There are too many other trails there."

Half an hour later the posse reached the main road and there halted. They seemed to decide that the bandits would not dare go toward Kearney, so they turned and went in the opposite direction.

"That's just as we want it, boys," Jesse said. "Now we'll go back to Crouch's and wait till Cole comes back from Kearney. Cole, go on and see what news you can pick up."

Cole Younger at once rode off up the road toward Kearney, and the others recrossed the highway and started for the old moonshiner's place again.

"They won't look for us there again soon," Jesse said, "and we can count on a few days of rest, anyway."

"But they may seek to arrest the family for shooting at 'em," Bob replied.

"That depends on what damage was done," Jesse returned.

The sun was just sinking behind the trees when they reached the moonshiner's home.

Some of the girls had been crying over the sudden flight of the bandits. But when they saw them again they gave a shout of joyous welcome and ran to meet them.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come back," cried Myra as Bob sprang from his horse and kissed her.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD DOCTOR AND THE DETECTIVE.

Old Dr. Gray was sitting in his little office at home when the door-bell rang.

His niece went to the door.

There stood a man with his face tied up, as if suffering with neuralgia or toothache.

"Is the doctor in?" the man asked.

"Yes, sir. Walk in."

He went in and took a seat while she went into the little office to tell the doctor that a patient was waiting for him.

"Tell him to come in," he said, and she went back and showed him into the little office.

"Take a seat, sir," said the doctor, rising, and pointing to a vacant chair. "What is the trouble with you now?"

"That's what I have come to find out, doctor," the man replied, taking off the bandages that bound up his face.

When he got them all off he looked up at the doctor, and the physician looked at him as if very much astonished, and said:

"Oh, it's you, eh?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Well, where's Jesse?"

"With the boys."

"And they?"

"In the saddle."

"I hear you made a big haul on the train the other day?"

"Yes, so we did."

"The people are very much excited over it."

"Yes, I reckon so. Do you know a man of the name of Coleman, doctor?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"He was stopping at Martin's and Joe Williams' dog bit him badly one night—the night Jesse was here, and I was sent for to patch him up. Why?"

"I want to find out something about him. He is not at Martin's now, is he?"

"I believe he has been missing for some two or three days."

"You and Jesse caught him shadowing your stable, didn't you?"

"Yes, and Jesse said he was a spy. He may be one for all I know."

"Do you know a man named Hal Haynes?"

"No, I don't, but I have heard of him. He is a detective."

"Yes."

"We caught a spy the other night. He was a desperate fellow, and made his escape with the loss of his pants, which we held on to. In one of the pockets we found a wallet with money and papers in it. One paper was a receipted bill against Coleman for medical attendance made out by you."

"Yes, for one hundred dollars," said the doctor. "Williams paid the bill, but I gave Coleman a duplicate bill at his request."

"Yes, and in the same wallet we found a note for money loaned by Hal Haynes—the famous detective."

The old doctor started as if stung.

Was it possible the great detective was shadowing him also?

"Coleman and Haynes the same man!" he exclaimed.

"It looks that way," said Cole Younger, for he it was. "and Jesse wanted you to know it that you might be on your guard. You have not said anything out of the way to him?"

"No, I never do to any one," and the old doctor shook his head in a very positive manner. "But look here, Younger, you know Joe Williams, don't you?"

"Yes, the meanest man in Kearney."

"Well, he knows too much."

"He does!"

"Yes."

"How did he find it out?"

"That's what puzzles me. He knows every time one of you come to Kearney."

"The deuce!"

"Yes."

"How do you know he does?"

"He told me so."

"Bah! He is blowing."

"That's what I thought at first, but I found out that he wasn't for he told me just when Jesse, Jim and Bob were here and when they were in my house," and then the doctor told him how Williams had made him take eighty dollars off Coleman's bill before he would pay it.

Cole Younger was amazed.

"Has he ever gone out with any posse?" he asked of the doctor.

"No. He never seems to bother himself about anything but his own affairs."

"Does he talk much?"

"No."

"Do the people know that he knows of our visits to Kearney?"

"I don't think they do."

"How does he find out these things?"

"That's a mystery to me."

"Jesse told me to ask you whether you had found out anything about your niece's lover?"

"I know that she has none," the old doctor replied.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am."

Cole looked up at him in silence for nearly a minute and then remarked:

"She is too smart for you, doctor."

"How so? What do you mean?"

"They are talking about her and her lover all over town."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"Who do they say he is?"

"Coleman."

"Eh! Eh! Who did you say?"

"Coleman," repeated Younger.

The old doctor's jaws seemed to relax, for his chin rested on his chest as he leaned back in his chair and glared hopelessly at the highwayman.

"Yes," said Cole. "They are talking about her meeting him at late hours of night and—"

"It's all a lie—a mean, infamous lie!" groaned the old doctor. "She does not go out of the house of evenings unless I or some one of her friends go with her."

"Well, that's what they are saying," said Cole. "It's strange you have not heard of it long before this."

"It can't be true, for you have just told me that you and the rest of you have had a fight with him twenty miles away from here. If he is following your band he can't be meeting her in Kearney."

"Coleman and Haynes are one and the same, doctor, and we want you to know that. Here's your pay for last month. Keep an eye on your niece, and see upon what grounds so much gossip about her is based. We will keep an eye on Williams, and one of our band will come here and board at Martin's for a few weeks to see what he can find out."

He handed the doctor a roll of bills and then proceeded to tie up his face again, preparatory to leaving.

"I shall do my best to find out all about it," the doctor said, as he took the money and stowed it carefully away in his pocket.

Cole then left and the old doctor sank back in his big arm-chair and drew his hand across his eyes.

"I'll go crazy if this thing goes on much longer," he said to himself.

Then he relapsed into silence again and sat gazing out of the window with a far-away look in his eyes.

"She says she dreams of meeting him often," he muttered, "and that he merely asks her about the James Boys. She is not even acquainted with him. Yet the whole town is talking about her meeting him. She says he does not talk love to her in her dreams. I wish I knew what it all means. I can't believe she would lie to me. Sallie won't tell lies. She was always truthful. I couldn't tell him about it for he would laugh at it and call it rot. Ah! There he goes now! He has come back from the pursuit of Jesse James! I'll keep an eye on her now and see that he does not meet her without my knowledge," and he sprang up and paced to and fro in his little office after seeing Coleman pass by on the street.

All that afternoon old Dr. Gray kept his eye on his niece as she went about her household duties.

But he did not see that he was learning anything by his vigils.

Yet he had sworn to keep up the watch and he did, till at last about nine o'clock in the evening he noticed some queer actions on her part.

She turned very pale and seemed trying to repel something from her. At times she would throw her hands as if to release herself from the grasp of some unseen individual.

Suddenly she put on a cloak and hat and went out of the rear door of the house.

The old doctor put a revolver into his pocket and seized his heavy ebony cane, after which he hastened to follow her.

She went down the path through the garden to the stable. There she opened the gate and passed out to the street. There she was joined by Coleman, who took both her hands in his and said:

"You resisted me as long as you could, but my power is too great for you. You had to come. Tell me—where is Jesse James now at this moment? Look for him! Look for him! You can see all things. Do you see him?"

"Yes," she replied, in a tone such as the old doctor had never heard come from her before.

"Where is he?"

"In a big farm-house in a great forest. They are all there but one."

"Are you sure you see him?"

"Yes."

"Who else do you see?"

"An old couple with many children. Two sons and their wives

and four sisters to whom the James Boys' men are paying much attention."

"The deuce!" muttered Coleman. "That can't be right. Look again and tell me what they are doing."

"They are going to have a dance. One of the young men is tuning his violin."

"Do you see them plainly?"

"Yes."

"Is there a large oak tree in the front yard?"

"Yes."

"And a seat built against it?"

"Yes."

"That will do; you may go back to the house now," and he held open the gate for her to pass through.

She turned and entered again, and as Coleman shut the gate behind her the doctor's heavy ebony cane descended on his head like a thunderbolt.

He went down like a log, and a thousand stars flashed before his eyes.

At the same time Sallie gave a cry and sank down to the ground, as though the blow had fallen on her head as well as on Coleman's.

The doctor took her up in his arms and bore her toward the house.

When half way there she came to and struggled to release herself from his arms.

"Oh, let me go, please!" she cried, in a very frightened tone of voice.

He stood her on her feet and said:

"Don't be frightened, my child."

"Oh, is it you, uncle?"

"Yes, dear. Go into the house and up to your room."

She ran in and locked herself in her room, while the old doctor proceeded to fasten all the doors and windows so she could not get out again by herself.

Then he went into his office and sat down in his big arm-chair.

"Yes—yes, that's it!" he muttered. "I've heard of it and read of it, but never believed in such things. Hypnotism—yes, that's what it is. Another name for mesmerism. I've read of the wonderful things done by jugglers in India. He holds her by his will, and whatsoever he commands she does like a willing slave."

He looked through his books for light on the subject, but the cold science of medicine deals not with mysteries that cannot be diagnosed.

Hours passed, and when the clock on the mantel in the sitting-room struck one, he closed the book with a weary sigh, and said, as he rose to his feet:

"I'll see him to-morrow, and tell him that if it is repeated I'll shoot him in cold blood, and by the Eternal, I'll do it, too!"

He went to bed and slept uneasily the rest of the night. Sallie noticed it the next morning and asked him what the trouble was.

"Do you not know?" he asked her.

"No, uncle."

"Did you dream of meeting that man again last night?"

"Yes, uncle, and when I woke up I was down in the yard with you, with my hat and cloak on."

Then he explained the mystery to her as best he could, and she was horrified.

She burst into tears and said:

"Oh, I want to die! I have believed all the time that I was dreaming, and have dreamed so often of meeting him in many places."

"Do you recollect how you felt last night just before you went out to meet him?"

"Yes. I heard him calling me, and tried to resist going, but something seemed to take complete control of all my faculties and pulled me along as though I were but a child. Oh, uncle, let me go away! Let me go away, please, or I shall die of fright and shame!"

"No, my child. I am going to see him to-day and tell him that if it is ever repeated I'll kill him. This is your home, and you shall not be driven out of it by such a man. He has no designs on you at all. He is a famous detective, and has used you as a clairvoyant to reveal the movements of Jesse James and his band. I heard him ask you where they were last night, and you told him."

"Why, how could I when I didn't know?"

"Ah! That's one of the mysteries of mesmerism, hypnotism, clairvoyance or whatever it may be. But you described a big farmhouse in a vast forest, where they were having a dance with a lot of country girls."

She was dumbfounded with amazement, and seemed utterly overcome with horror at learning how a stranger had been controlling her mental faculties and making her do his bidding.

He had to use a good deal of nerve-quieting potions to keep her from going into a state of nervous prostration.

In the afternoon he called at the hotel and asked for Coleman.

"He is just going out with a posse after the James Boys, under

the sheriff," said the landlord. "You will find him down at Howard's stable with Sheriff Ames."

To the stable he went.

About a score of men were there, and on the point of leaving with the sheriff.

He went up to Coleman and laying a hand on his shoulder, said:

"If you do that again I'll kill you!"

Coleman looked him in the eyes and said:

"I understand you, but do you know my motive?"

"Yes, I think I do. But if you repeat it I'll shoot you as I would a dog."

"I am not afraid of you."

"Very well—at your peril."

"I have you in my power, and——"

Whack!

The old doctor dealt him a blow under the left ear that sent him reeling against a very vicious horse.

The horse kicked, and Coleman went into a corner all in a heap, more dead than alive.

When he was taken up he was unconscious and bleeding at the mouth.

"Great Scott!" gasped the sheriff. "What does this mean, doctor?"

"It means that he is an infamous scoundrel," the old man replied. "He has injured the good name of my niece by his conduct, and I told him if he did not stop it I'd kill him. He said he had me in his power, and then I struck him. Even the horse put in a blow for the innocent girl."

"Served him right!" exclaimed one of the posse.

"Yes, so it did. Good for you, doctor," and they all shook hands with the old physician.

Men like to see men resent wrongs, and the bold way of the doctor won their hearts at once.

"Well, I am sorry this has happened," said the sheriff.

"Yes," said another, "for he is badly hurt and can't go with us."

"Send for Dr. Holmes," the sheriff said.

A man ran up the street for Dr. Holmes. In five minutes he returned and reported Dr. Holmes out of town.

"Call Dr. Ellis or Dr. Morris."

Neither of the others were in.

"Dr. Gray, I shall have to ask you to attend to him, then," the sheriff said.

"And I flatly refuse. I hope the horse has settled him!"

"I am astonished at you, doctor!"

"I wouldn't raise my hand to save his life, sheriff," and the indignant old man seemed in the humor to fight the sheriff and the entire posse.

He turned on his heel and walked away, and the unconscious man was taken up and carried to his hotel.

An hour later Dr. Ellis came to the hotel, and found him with two broken ribs and other injuries more or less serious.

The posse did not go out, for Coleman was the only one who knew where to go to find the James Boys, and he was not in a condition to tell them how they could find them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF JOE WILLIAMS.

When Cole Younger returned to the band, he found them all having a high old time at the home of the old moonshiner. They were living well and doing nothing, and in the evening the old cracked violin set them all to dancing.

He made his report to Jesse of his interview with the old doctor.

"What did he say about Sallie's lover?"

"He said he knew that she had none, and yet the whole town was talking about her and Coleman."

"Coleman?"

"Yes. They say he is her lover."

"Well, that settles it—the detective!" and he seemed to be no little surprised at the news.

"Coleman was in town getting ready to go out with Sheriff Ames' posse."

"They don't know where we are?"

"No, I think not. They wouldn't dream of our coming back here so soon after being run out."

"Was the doctor surprised at hearing who Coleman is?"

"Yes; it nearly took his breath away."

"Did you tell him Coleman was Sallie's lover?"

"Yes, and it staggered him. He said he'd find out about it. He wants to see you."

"Yes, and I must see him."

They then went up to one of the rooms and had a long talk over the new detective.

The result of the talk was the departure of the bandit chief within an hour after the arrival of Cole Younger.

But their experience had caused them to be more on their guard. From the time the stars appeared in the evening till they faded away in the morning they had guards out, and so those in the house had no fears of being taken by surprise.

The bandit chief was challenged as he rode away from the barn, and the old James Boys' signal saved him from getting a bullet. He then pushed on as well as the darkness would permit.

In due time he reached the main road and turned his horse's head toward Kearney.

Being anxious to get there before daylight he rode fast.

By and by he reached the outskirts of Kearney and slackened his speed.

He rode round the back way to the old doctor's stable and soon had Siroc in his stall.

Ten minutes later he was asleep in the loft on the hay.

He didn't awake till about ten o'clock, and then he spent some little time in arranging his disguise before he descended to the ground floor.

Just as he reached the stall Dr. Gray himself came in.

But for the black horse in the stall he would not have known who the bandit chief was.

"Well, I'm glad to see you," he said, as he reached out his hand to him.

"All well, doctor?"

"No. Sallie is down sick from excitement and nervous prostration. Come up to the house, for I have much to tell you," and he led the way up to the house, followed by Jesse James.

In the little office he told Jesse all that had happened since Cole Younger's visit.

The bandit chief was thunderstruck at the revelation.

"Dr. Gray," he said, "if any other man had told me this thing I could not have believed it. I have heard and read of such things, but could not believe them."

"So have I, and, like you, I could not believe in it. But I heard him ask her where you were at that moment, and she described a large old farm-house in a great forest, where the James Boys were dancing with some country girls. I saw at once that she had clairvoyant powers under his mesmeric influence, and that you were in danger."

"Yes. Is he able to see any one now?"

"I don't know. I refused to attend him after he was hurt."

"Well, I am going over to the hotel and see what I can find out about him, and if the posse is going out to-day. I shall come back again as soon as possible," and he arose and left the house.

Over at the hotel he entered the bar-room and took a drink.

That was the one little necessary formula to finding good-fellowship in Kearney. There were others there who did a good deal of talking, and he did the listening.

He heard everybody praise the old doctor for what he had done, and many denounced Coleman for his conduct toward Sallie Gray.

But they did not dream that he was a detective, nor that he had simply used her clairvoyant powers for the purpose of locating the James Boys.

While he was there Sheriff Ames came in with the doctor who was attending the wounded man.

He was something of a politician, and called on all hands in the place to take a drink with him.

Jesse James joined the crowd and clinked glasses with the sheriff, after which he said:

"Why don't you go out with the posse you organized a few days ago, sheriff?"

"I am going up-stairs to see Coleman now," he said. "I want him to give me the points so I can go at once. Before he was hurt he said he knew where the James Boys were hiding and was going to lead us there."

"But did he really know?"

"Well, he said the same thing once before, and led a posse right on to 'em. The James Boys showed fight and got away, however."

"How did he find out so much?"

"I don't know. Our boys seemed to have faith in him. If he will tell me where they are I'll go at once—this very afternoon," and he turned and went up-stairs with the physician.

Jesse waited about the hotel till he came down again.

"We are going to start inside of two hours," said the sheriff. "It will take us that long to get all together," and he hurried off down the street.

Jesse returned to the office of old Dr. Gray and said to him:

"I am going away. Keep an eye on Sallie. I'll send one of my men here to watch your house of nights. You can do that yourself in the daytime."

"Yes," the doctor replied. "I can take care of things in the daytime."

Jesse went down to the stable and went in to see Siroc.

The splendid animal was glad to see him and showed his pleasure by laying his head against him.

He put on the saddle and bridle and led him out into the stable-yard.

Just as he was going to open the gate that led out into the street, the muzzle of a Winchester rifle was thrust through a crevice, and a voice said:

"Hands up!"

Jesse turned and saw his peril.

Up went his hands above his head.

"Now come out!" ordered the man.

He passed through the gate; but the gate post enabled him to draw his knife, which happened to be more convenient than his revolver at that moment. Ere the man could withdraw the rifle from the crevice of the fence, Jesse was upon him.

The cold steel settled him in a single blow, and he sank to the ground with a groan.

"It's the end of you, Joe Williams," Jesse said, as he wiped his knife and restored it to its place. "You won't get any reward for capturing me."

He led Siroc through the gate, closed it very carefully, and then sprang into the saddle, not even stopping to get his money or watch.

Riding through several back streets he managed to escape observation. People were so interested in seeing the posse under Sheriff Ames leave that no one gave a thought to the stranger on a black horse.

But some boys soon found the dead body of Joe Williams lying where he had fallen and the alarm was given.

The news spread like wildfire, and half the population turned out to see the victim.

Then people remembered seeing a man on a black horse ride through certain streets, and intense excitement followed.

Old Dr. Gray was questioned, but he stoutly maintained that he knew nothing of any one being about his stable.

"It was undoubtedly Jesse James," said the sheriff, "and he has heard that our posse is about to leave town to hunt him down."

"Nonsense, sheriff," said a hard-headed old citizen. "Jesse James didn't have anything to do with it."

"How do you know he didn't?"

"He was not robbed. He had \$50 in his pocket and a gold watch and chain worth \$150 if a cent!"

"That's so," said a dozen others at once. "Jesse James takes all he can lay his hands on every time."

"Of course he does. Jesse James didn't kill Joe Williams."

"Who did, then?"

"That's a question. Joe had many enemies. He was out with his Winchester after somebody and got caught himself."

"That's about the size of it, I reckon," said the hard-headed old citizen, and nearly everybody in Kearney seemed to think he was right.

Citizens took the body of the dead man to his late residence, and the sheriff and his posse mounted their horses and struck out in the direction of the old moonshiner's home in the great forest again.

Jesse James had taken another route to avoid the perils of his ride the night before, and rode like the wind to reach Crouch's place before the posse could get there.

He got there just as the stars were coming out, and was challenged by those on guard. The exchange of signals was soon made, and then he said:

"We must leave here at once. The sheriff is coming with a strong posse, and will reach here some time to-night. Leave your posts and get some horses as quick as you can. I'll see them at the house."

He entered the house a few minutes later and told them all what was going to happen.

"Now see here, old man," he said to the old moonshiner: "when they come here you must all be cool and quiet, and swear we have not been back here since we left in such a hurry the other day. Say you didn't know who we were or we could not have stopped here a minute's time. If they ask you why you fired on 'em say they began the shooting, and that you only defended yourself."

"But when will you come back again?" Bettie demanded.

"I can't say, but soon—in a few days, perhaps," Jesse replied.

"Where are you going?"

"We don't know. We are going to get out of the way of that posse."

"Why not stay here and fight 'em?"

"Because that is bad policy. We don't want to provoke the government to such an extent as to cause the troops to be called out, for in that case we'd have to leave the State for good."

"You are right," said the old man. "Don't shoot till you're obliged to."

"That's our rule, and then shoot to kill."

"Exactly. Them's my rules, too."

In half an hour the bandits had kissed the women good-by and were in the saddle.

Jesse led off and made his way toward the main road that led to Ennis station. The way was so dark, though, that they could not make more than three miles an hour.

But they finally reached the big road and made their way to a woods in which they found shelter for the day, two of their number going out after provisions.

It was about daylight when the sheriff's posse surrounded the old moonshiner's house and demanded the surrender of the James Boys.

The old man got up and put his head out of the window, and asked what the trouble was.

"We want Jesse James and his gang," replied the sheriff, "and we'll have 'em if we have to burn down the house."

"But thar ain't nobody hyer but me an' my family."

"Well, we can't take your word for that," was the reply.

"They was here t'other day, an' we didn't know who they was. They hain't bin hyer since. Send one o' yer men in, an' let him go through ther house an' see wha' is hyer."

"That's all right. I'll come in myself, old man," and Sheriff Ames boldly went up to the door and waited till the old man admitted him.

He was shown into every room, even where the girls and children were, and it was quite plain to him that the bandits were not in the house.

"They haven't been back here since they escaped us the other day?" the sheriff asked.

"No," was the reply.

"Sure of that?"

"Yes. Do you think I am a liar?" and the old moonshiner gave him a look that sent a cold chill down his spinal column.

"Oh, no; of course not," he replied.

"All right. Now run erlong home, an' ef yer come round hyer ergin them 'ere Winchesters hangin' up thar'll bark at yer," and he pointed to the eight rifles hanging against the wall.

The sheriff went out to his posse in the full belief that Coleman had made a mistake this time in locating the James Boys.

"They are not here, boys," he said to them, "nor have they been here for a week. We may as well go back and wait for them on the main road."

"How do you know they ain't hiding around here somewhere?" one of the men asked.

"I don't know, nor do you," the sheriff replied.

"Then why not make a search for them?"

"I am willing to do so," and they searched the barn and stable and then turned their attention to the great forest all round them.

But they soon saw that if the bandits had gone into the forest they could never be found in it. It was too immense, and so they gave it up and left in disgust.

That evening Jesse made up his mind to return to the old moonshiner's and wait there till he could hear from Kearney again. He had sent one of his men to aid old Dr. Gray in keeping a watch on the latter's premises.

The girls set up a shout when they saw the bandits again, and the old man and the two sons were more than willing to act as guards for them at \$100 a day.

This time the sheriff and his men did not disturb them, for they did not believe that the bandits would go back there so soon.

Two weeks passed, and the bandit sent to Kearney had settled down as the old doctor's hired man. He sent reports to Jesse every day by a member of the band who rode in to get it.

The doctor's stable was watched day and night, and the hired man was on guard every night, too.

At last Coleman was able to get out and strolled around town a few times.

The old doctor met him on the street and said:

"You are out again. If you bother my niece again I'll kill you. I give you fair warning."

"That's all right, doctor," he replied. "I shall not bother her again."

"I hope you won't," and the old doctor passed on.

A few days more passed, and Coleman's strength seemed to have come back to him again. He was walking along a side street, when he suddenly came face to face with Sallie Gray.

She started, turned pale as death, and would have fled, but in a moment she had lost her will power and stole up alongside of him, again under his mesmeric influence.

Then he questioned her as to the whereabouts of Jesse James, and she told him they were all at the old farm-house in the great forest.

He was amazed, for they were not there when Ames' posse called the fortnight before, though she had said they were.

But he never doubted his power, and he had told Ames that the James Boys were there just before he surrounded the house.

He let her go and she hastened home.

Her uncle was out and she did not know what to do.

The doctor never let her know that his hired man was one of the

James Boys' bandits, as Jesse had exacted a promise that he would not.

While she was waiting for the old doctor to return Cole Younger came in. She knew his voice.

"Oh, I know you!" she said. "I am so glad you have come. Uncle is gone to see a patient and it is uncertain when he will come in. I met Coleman quite by accident this morning, and before I could get away he asked me a good many questions about your band. Everything seemed like a dream to me, and I can't recollect much about it. But I am sure a posse will start to-morrow morning. Go and tell Jesse James about it. He will understand it better than you do and know what to do."

Cole thanked her and then sought the hired man. He told him to keep an eye on her and hurried away.

In the meantime Coleman went to see the sheriff again.

"I want a dozen good men to go out with me to-morrow morning, sheriff," he said to that officer.

"Where are you going?"

"To hunt for Jesse James."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know, but I think I can find him."

"Well, I won't call 'em out on such a statement as that," the sheriff said, "but if you will call for volunteers you can get all you want, I think."

"Well, I am not well enough acquainted here to do that. Will you get them for me?"

"No, but I'll go round with you and introduce you to them, and let you do the talking."

"That will do," and in an hour or two it was known all over Kearney that a posse would start out again the next morning.

Cole Younger hastened back to the old moonshiner's and told Jesse what Sallie Gray had said to him.

"Ah! The villain has hypnotized her again!" Jesse said. "Cole, we must put an end to him at once and forever."

"Yes," replied Cole, "but how can we?"

"Easily enough. One bold stroke and it is done."

"Well, let us know how."

"Go to Kearney at once. We can reach there before daylight. Ride up to Martin's Hotel and go in and kill him."

"Kill who—Martin?"

"No, Coleman."

"Ah! yes."

"Then we can dash out of town when nine-tenths are still asleep. That fellow Coleman, or Haynes, as we know him, is the most dangerous man we have had to deal with. He has clairvoyant powers and can locate us anywhere in the world."

"Don't tell Frank that, Jesse, or he'll just give up at once."

"I'll tell no one but you. Go and tell 'em to get ready to leave at once."

The bandits were always ready to go on short notice, but the four sisters were not willing to let them do so, though they had hopes that they would see them again within another day.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE'S CAPTURE AND ESCAPE.

The gray streaks of coming dawn were visible in the eastern horizon when a band of ten horsemen rode into Kearney.

They rode leisurely so as to attract no attention. Only two people were out on the streets at that early hour. One of those was a man going home who had been sitting up with a sick friend.

The other was a negro man who was on the lookout for a chicken for his breakfast.

Those two saw the bandits, and both knew that the man on the black horse was Jesse James.

But they dared not say a word, for the terrible robber chief was one they all feared.

The band rode up to the Martin House and dismounted.

The watchman was almost paralyzed when he saw the black horse.

Jesse drew his revolver and said:

"Lead us up to Coleman's room."

"Y-y-yes, sir!" he stammered.

"If you make a mistake it will cost you your life," Jesse said to him.

"I know where his room is."

He led the way up-stairs, and Jesse, Jim, Cole and Bob Younger followed him.

Knocking on the door they heard Coleman getting out of bed.

He was expecting every moment to be called, as he had left word with the clerk to do so on account of making an early start with the posse that morning.

When he opened the door Jesse and Cole covered him with their revolvers.

"We want you, Haynes," Jesse said.

He was almost paralyzed at seeing them.

"Hands up!"

He held them up.

They entered and Jesse added:

"Put on your clothes."

They disarmed him and then put bracelets on him.

"Now, come with us," and they led him down-stairs, where they

put him on a horse which had been brought along for that purpose.

Then they rode off with him.

The watchman lost no time in giving the alarm.

Martin himself was the first to spring out of bed when he heard the news.

In half an hour the whole town knew that the James Boys had come in and taken Coleman away from his room in the hotel.

The posse got together as quickly as possible and followed them.

But the bandits took to the woods, and just where they left the road the pursuers never knew.

In the depths of the woods, a mile away from the road, the bandits came to a halt and dismounted.

"This is the end of your journey, Hal Haynes," Jesse said to the prisoner.

"Why have you brought me here?" Haynes asked.

"To hang you."

"Why did you take so much trouble? Why could you not have put an end to me in my room?"

"We could not very well hang you in your room."

"You wanted to hang me, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why that particular way of winding me up?"

"Oh, we thought it would please you most. We have been very anxious to please you of late."

"Yes, I observed it," and he gave a very sarcastic smile as he made the remark.

Jim Cummins adjusted a halter about his neck and said:

"Don't hypnotize me, please."

"Oh, you are not subject to such influences."

"Glad to hear it. Some women are, I hear."

"Yes, and a good many men, too."

"Do you think you can hypnotize this halter so it won't choke you?"

"No, but I know that after I am dead you fellows will never get rid of me."

"We won't, eh?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I'll follow wherever you go and——"

"Bah! Do you take us for old women, Haynes?" Jesse James asked.

"No, not at all. I know what I am saying and know that it is true. You know something of my strange powers. They will not leave me after death. I'll never leave one of you, either, until you get under the sod. Go on with your miserable work. I am not afraid to die. One can't die but once, and that we have all got to do."

"That's so," said Cummins. "Just step this way, please, under this limb, and I'll soon string you up and——"

Whr-r-r! Spat!

"Ugh! Rattler!" gasped Jim, as a big rattlesnake struck his boot leg.

He made a leap and began some very lively dancing to get rid of the venomous serpent.

The fangs were fastened in the boot leg and could not be withdrawn, and the savage reptile, which was as large as a man's arm, seemed to show immense energy.

The bandits soon dispatched him.

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob. "Haynes has skipped!"

They looked and found him gone.

"Scatter and run him down!" yelled Jesse James.

The bandits instantly scattered through the woods, weapons in hand, and ran in every direction.

Ten minutes were enough to tell them he had made good his escape in that dense forest.

Jesse called them in by signals and said:

"Boys, he had the chance and seized it, just as you and I would have done. He has given us the slip. We should have killed him in his room. But it was not to be. Let's be off and wait for another chance."

They remounted and made their way back to the road, reaching it just as a posse went dashing by.

"Two minutes later and they would have seen us," said Cole.

"Yes, but they are gone now and that's all we care for. I'd give ten thousand dollars to get that fellow Haynes again, for he'll give us no end of trouble."

"It was a most singular escape, to say the least."

"Yes, and it shows what a quick-witted fellow he is."

"None of us saw him when he skipped. We all heard the rattler and saw Jim leap back with the snake clinging to his boot leg."

"Oh, it was quite natural that none of us should have thought of nothing but the rattler at the moment. Nobody is to blame. Luck was simply against us, that's all."

"Where shall we go now?"

"We had better go to the Chalk Bluffs and wait there till this thing blows over."

They started off and soon turned into a cross road and hurried forward at a good pace.

But ere they had gone a mile they met two women in a wagon.

"Those women will tell the posse we passed them on this road," Jesse said to Cole.

"Yes, but we have to take the chances on that. It won't do to interfere with them."

"No, you are right. The women are not down on us very much. It pays to keep on good terms with them."

"Yes, so it does, and as they passed the two homely women every bandit raised his hat to them."

The women were flattered, and they talked about nothing else for five miles. Then they met another party of horsemen, who did not take off their hats to them.

But one of the horsemen spoke to them and asked if they had met a party of men on horseback.

"Yes," said one of them, "and they were all gentlemen, too. They took off their hats to us."

"Did one ride a fine black horse?"

"Yes, a very fine coal black horse."

"Ah! How far back?"

"About five miles—in the cross road that runs east from this one—two miles from here."

"Going east?"

"Yes."

"The road crosses this one two miles from here?"

"Yes."

"The man on the black horse was Jesse James, ma'am," and the posse then dashed away at full speed.

The two women nearly fainted in the wagon over the idea of having met the James Boys in the road.

It took them a long time to get over it, and they never forgot it.

But the posse they met was headed by Hal Haynes, the detective.

He had hastened through the woods to the highway, and struck it a little before the posse he had raised in Kearney came along.

"There he is! There's Coleman!" cried one of the posse on seeing him.

They were thunderstruck on seeing him.

"Take these irons off and give me a horse," he cried. "The James Boys are yet in these woods, and we may get a chance at them!"

One of the men released him from the handcuffs and another took the halter off his neck.

"Give me those bracelets and that halter," he said as he reached for them. "I may have a chance to put 'em on him, and if I do I'll hang him as sure as my name is Hal Haynes."

"Hal Haynes!" exclaimed one of the members glaring at him.

"Yes, that's my name. I am the detective sent by the State, and I took the name of Coleman as a disguise. It is no longer necessary now. It's a fight to the death between Jesse James and me."

"How did you get away from them?" one of the posse asked.

He told the story of his escape, and it made him a hero with them.

One of them dismounted and gave him his horse, saying he would go back to Kearney.

"A thousand thanks, my friend," he said, as he took the horse.

"I am going to follow Jesse James day and night now till I get him. Who will stand by me?"

Every man sung out:

"I will!"

"Good! You are just the sort of men for the job. Come on. They will probably come on below here somewhere," and he led the way down the road, followed by the Kearney men, armed with Winchester.

Not seeing any signs of the bandits, they stopped in the woods by the roadside and waited to see if they would pass.

But the bandits struck the road a half mile below them, and an hour later Haynes decided to make a dash in that direction.

He met the two women in the wagon and got on the right trail at last.

"Now, come on, boys!" he cried, as he plunged ahead. "We have the best weapons and the best horses except the black one. If we can get in sight of them we can get one or two—maybe more," and they rode like the wind for many miles.

"They are making for the river," Haynes said, as he trailed them across another big road, "and they are not going to cross it, either."

"This road leads to the Chalk Bluffs," said one of the posse.

"That's where they are going, and we'll fetch up with 'em there."

When I give the order to fire be sure you take good aim and bring down your man."

"Do you mean to kill 'em?" one of the posse asked, quite surprised at the order.

"Of course. We want to wipe out the whole band if we can."

"Will we get the rewards just the same as if we captured them?"

"Just the same, and a chromo besides."

"All right then!" and they pushed on in the direction of the Chaik Bluffs.

"They are not a half hour ahead of us," one of the men said, as he looked at the fresh tracks made by the bandits' horses on the roadbed. "They are the only ones who have passed here to-day."

"We'll soon be up with them," and they rode on with no slackening of speed till they finally came in sight of the great bluffs on the west bank of the river.

Then they rode more slowly for fear of an ambush by the bandits.

They approached the bluff with a good deal of caution, but suddenly they were discovered and the alarm given.

"Come ahead, boys!" cried Haynes, dashing forward.

The others followed, and in a few minutes they were on the crest of the bluff which overlooked the great river.

"There they go!" he cried, as he saw nine horsemen struggling up a steep declivity from the plateau half way between the top of the bluff and the water.

"They are not out of range!" exclaimed some one in the posse.

"Let 'em have it, then."

The posse dismounted and unslung their Winchesters.

Crack!

Crack!

C-r-r-rack!

"That's it! Let 'em have it! They are in a panic! For God's sake take good aim! Take care of the man on the black horse! Here—hold my horse!" and Haynes seized a rifle and aimed at the man on the black horse.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

He fired three times.

But the mark was a quarter of a mile away and the sight on the rifle had not been adjusted for long range shooting.

The man on the black horse, though, urged his steed to some lively climbing to get out of the way of the bullets that were falling so fast all about him.

"Follow them, boys!" cried Haynes. "Give 'em no chance to rest or escape!" and he led off over the crest of the bluff in the same direction they had gone.

"There they go!"

"Shoot 'em!"

Crack!

Crack!

The constant crack of the Winchesters was heard as long as a bandit was in sight, though a half mile away.

But as soon as they reached the little path that led out to the main road a couple of miles away, the bandits dashed away at full speed.

"I think we gave 'em the slip, Jesse," said Frank James, as they rode along side by side.

"Yes, but I tell you that fellow has a bull-dog style about him that I don't like," Jesse replied. "He hangs on like grim death."

"Well, as long as we can shake him off, what difference does it make?"

"We may not always be able to shake him off," and Jesse shook his head.

"Why not wipe him out, then?"

"That's the only way we can get rid of him. He wants to hang some of us for the hanging we intended to give him this morning."

"He was a lucky dog to get away from us as he did."

"Lucky! It's something else besides luck, I'm afraid."

"What is it?"

"I don't know; fate, I reckon, would be the best name for it."

CHAPTER VIII.

DETECTIVE HAYNES MAKES HOT WORK FOR THE BANDITS.

Detective Haynes soon found out that Jesse James had given him the slip in the woods, and decided to waste no more time looking for him there. He called his posse back to the road and said to them:

"They have given us the slip, boys, and we'll have to hunt 'em up again."

"Where will you hunt 'em?" one asked.

"On the main road. Where is the nearest public highway from here?"

"This road will take us to it," said one of the party.

"Then we'll go there at once. Come on," and he led off at a brisk canter and the others followed him.

They struck the road some two miles below where the bandits entered it, and decided to wait in the woods there and let their horses rest.

The James boys had a long start of the posse. But they did not know they were coming.

After going some miles Jesse James turned into a small settlement road again, saying to Cole Younger:

"This leads off in the direction of the main road over in the other county. I think we had better get off this one and let the posse have it for a day or two."

"Yes, that is a good idea. But we'll strike the river road over this way."

"How far off?"

"Some ten miles or so."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes."

"Ever been through this road?"

"No, but I have been through the one a mile further on. This one goes right through, though."

"Then we'll stick to it."

"Yes."

They pushed on and some five or six miles farther on they struck a farm-house. It was about sunset.

"See here, boys," said Jesse. "We are hungry and so are our horses. We can't go far on empty stomachs. This seems to be a good place for a square meal."

"Yes," said Frank James. "I am as hungry as a wolf."

"We all are," added Jim Cummins.

"Then we'll stop and bargain for supper for ourselves and horses."

"But if they see Siroc they may know us," suggested Bob.

"If they do they'll take good care to be civil to us," Jesse remarked.

"Oh, well, if you don't mind being known go ahead."

"We can claim to be a posse and they'll never stop to notice our horses," and Jesse rode up the hill to the gate.

The farmer was in the yard, and he came to the gate to find out what so many men were coming that way for.

"Good evening, sir," Jesse greeted.

"Good-evening," returned the farmer.

"We are a posse going through to the river road to head off Jesse James, and would like to buy meals for ourselves and horses. There are ten of us. We'll give you twenty dollars for supper for man and horse."

"Just git down, gentlemen, and make yourselves at home," said the farmer. "My wife and daughters will soon have more ham and eggs and coffee than you can get away with."

"All right, sir," Jesse replied. "But tell your good wife that we are very hungry men, as we have been in the saddle all day, with nothing to eat since breakfast."

The farmer ran into the house and told his wife and daughters of the arrival of ten hungry men who were willing to pay two dollars each for supper for themselves and horses.

Then he came back and led the way to the barn, where the horses were rubbed down and fed with oats and hay.

While the supper was preparing, Jesse sent one of the bandits back a quarter of a mile to watch the road. He did not care to be caught napping by Haynes.

Half an hour later supper was announced by the farmer's wife, and they went in and found such abundance that every one remarked it.

"We may have to ride all night," Jesse said to the lady of the house. "Put up a lunch for each of us, and we'll pay ten dollars more."

She and her two daughters had the lunch ready by the time they had finished eating.

Jesse had just handed her thirty dollars when he heard the warning signal of his sentinel.

They made a break for the stable and reached it just as a posse of twenty citizens reached the gate in front of the house.

As the stars had come out it was too dark for the new arrivals to see what was going on at the barn.

The bandits had their horses ready inside of three minutes.

They opened a gate that led into a field and rode rapidly up to a point an eighth of a mile above the farm-house. There they tore down the fence and entered the road again.

In the meantime Hal Haynes called out to the farmer to come out to the gate.

He went out, and the detective asked:

"Have you see a party of some eight or ten men pass this way this afternoon?"

"Well, a party of ten men who took supper here has just left," he replied.

"Did one of them ride a black horse?"

"Yes."

"They were the James Boys. How long have they been gone?"

"The James Boys!" gasped the horrified farmer.

"Yes, Jesse James and his gang. How long have they been gone?"

"They may not be gone yet. They went to their horses at the barn ten or fifteen minutes ago. My God! Jesse James and his and! And they seemed like honest men, too!"

"Where is your barn? Come, lead the way! We want to see them," and the detective sprang to the ground, rifle in hand.

The others quickly followed them.

But the farmer's knees were knocking together.

He dared not lead the way to the barn for fear of the wrath of the bandits.

"There's the barn," he said, pointing to the big structure which loomed up indistinctly in the gloom of the increasing darkness.

"Come on, boys," and the intrepid detective led the way toward it.

They followed, but a few moments revealed the fact that they had escaped them.

"They have Old Nick's own luck," said Haynes, as he saw where they had gone through a gate into the field. "There's no use trying to find them in the dark. We may as well rest here and take a fresh start in the morning."

The detective called the farmer to him and told him they would have to stay all night with him.

"Why, I can't lodge but two or three of you," he said.

"You can feed us and our horses, and we can sleep on the hay up in the barn. We pay as we go."

That was satisfactory and again the wife and daughters went to work to cook another supper. But they were greatly excited over the fact that the terrible James Boys had been in the house and eaten at their table.

In the meantime the bandits were hurrying away toward the old river road. They did not believe the posse would follow them in the dark.

"Now is our chance to shake 'em off," Jesse said to them when they reached the main road. "We must travel all night and lie by during the day."

"Which way shall we go?" Cole Younger asked.

"We must get away from our old haunts to give 'em the slip. Come on," and he led off in a westerly direction.

They traveled all night and when morning came they were nearly forty miles away from the scene of their last hold-up.

The lunch they had brought with them served for their breakfast, and they stopped an hour to let their horses graze.

Then they sought a deep wood and slept the greater part of the day, taking turns at watching and guarding the horses.

But when evening came they were very hungry men.

"We must have a square meal," Jesse said, "and as we have shaken them off we may as well go to the village and stop at the hotel there."

They so agreed and mounted for the road once more.

The village was only two miles away and was soon reached.

The one hotel in the place was pointed out to them by a negro man on the street, and they rode up to it and dismounted in front of it.

The landlord came out and greeted them with a pleasant smile on his face.

"Got any room for us, landlord?" Jesse asked.

"Oh, yes, plenty of room, though a party of twenty men from Kearney came an hour ago. They are after the James Boys."

Quick as a flash Jesse gave the signal, and every bandit sprang into his saddle again. He dashed away across the public square and they followed him at full speed, never stopping till they were several miles beyond the place.

Then they came to a halt.

"What an escape!" exclaimed Cole.

"Yes," said Frank. "We ran right into them. How in thunder did they know we had come this way?"

"That is not the question for us to answer," Jesse put in. "The question is how can we get rid of 'em?"

"Yes, that's so," said Jim Cummins.

"They are too strong for us to fight," Bob remarked.

"Yes."

"We must scatter," Jesse said, after a pause of some minutes.

"Yes, that's the only way," Frank admitted.

"We meet at La Grange on Thursday night at seven o'clock," Jesse said, "and till then every man can go where he pleases and do as he pleases. I would advise that you go in pairs, though."

"Jim Cummins, you go with me," said Bob Younger.

"That suits me," Jim replied.

"Cole, you and I will go together," Jesse said to the eldest of the Younger brothers.

They soon paired off and then separated.

Jim and Bob turned and rode back to the village, putting up at the hotel where Haynes and his men were.

"Landlord!" exclaimed Jim as he entered the hotel, "where is the sheriff of this county?"

"At his home in Rawson, I guess. Why? What's the matter?"

"We have been held up and robbed by a gang of men on horseback just out of town."

"When?"

"Not over a half hour ago."

"Did one ride a black horse?"

"I can't say. It was too dark for me to see."

"I had some money in a letter which they did not get," Bob said, "or we'd be without a cent. The sheriff ought to look out for highwaymen."

"They were the James Boys who passed through here an hour ago," the landlord replied. "There is a posse here now who has been chasing 'em for two days."

"Well, I'd like to see 'em caught and hanged, the villains! The troops ought to be called out and made to run 'em down and shoot 'em on sight," and Jim was very eloquent in his wrath over his alleged robbery.

The posse got around them and heard their story, as did many citizens who had come in on hearing of the James Boys passing through the place.

Detective Haynes had quite a talk with Bob, questioning him as to where he was going. The young bandit was good at playing a part, and answered every question in a frank, manly way that disarmed all suspicion.

"How many were in that gang?" the detective asked.

"I counted nine, but my friend says there were ten in all. I reckon I was too badly rattled to be quite sure of anything."

"Pretty badly broke up, eh?"

"Yes, I was, to tell the truth."

"Well, I don't wonder at it—ten to two, and they had the drop on you all the time."

"Yes. I'd like to see them behind the bars, but I'm frank to say I haven't the nerve to face a revolver."

Haynes laughed and said:

"You are not the only man who feels that way. When one gets the drop on you it's good sense and prudence to give up and stand the expense of the thing. 'All that a man hath will he give for his life.' You know who said that, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Then you know it's true. I admire a man who frankly owns up as you do and does no bragging," and he shook hands with the young bandit as he spoke.

"Thanks," replied Bob. "If I had known it was Jesse James I would have fallen off my horse with fright."

Haynes laughed again, and Bob asked the landlord if it was too late for himself and friend to get supper.

"Oh, no. You can have supper."

"Well, I can assure you that I have an aching void in my stomach as well as in my pocket."

The landlord went to see about a supper for two.

"Which way do you go from here?" Haynes asked him.

"Kansas City," he replied.

While they were at supper Haynes went to the stable and looked at the two horses belonging to Bob and Jim.

He could not recognize them by any particular marks.

He was not suspicious of them, but did it as a matter of precaution.

That evening Bob and Jim became quite well acquainted with several of the Kearney boys, and drank with them a number of times.

The next morning Haynes was uncertain which way to go. But he made up his mind to go on in the direction taken by the bandits when they dashed out of the town.

As for Bob and Jim they paid their bills and set out to return the way they had come.

They traveled all day and spent the night at a farm-house.

Early the next day they reached the old moonshiner's place in the great forest, and found the women all at home, but the old man and the two boys were out in the woods somewhere.

Myra ran to Bob and Bettie to Jim, and the welcome the two bandits received was quite satisfactory to them.

"Where are the others?" they were asked.

"They are scattered about in several places," Bob replied.

"When will they come here again?"

"No man can tell. They had to scatter to break up a chase, and some of them may get here at any time."

"Who chased you?"

"That fellow Haynes and a posse from Kearney."

"Well, if ever he comes here again he'll never get away alive," said Bettie.

"I hope not," Jim returned.

The two couples were very happy together, and in the middle of the afternoon they went out for a stroll to the creek for berries.

An hour later Bettie came flying back to the house, hair flying and eyes blazing.

"They have arrested Jim!" she cried, as she reached for one of the Winchesters hanging against the wall.

Three of her sisters seized rifles and stood ready to go with her.

"Come on!" she cried, and she flew out of the house, ran to the gate and dashed off down the little road at full speed, followed by the other girls.

The creek crossed the road about a quarter of a mile from the house.

When she reached it she made a hurried examination and exclaimed:

"They haven't crossed yet. Hide in the bushes—quick!" and they darted into the bushes by the roadside.

Just a few minutes passed and then four men came along on horseback, with Jim Cummings on foot in front of them—a prisoner.

"Halt! Hands up!" cried Bettie.

They halted and then laughed, for Bettie's voice was girlish.

"Hands up, or we fire!"

"You can't play that game on me, my dear girl," the deputy sheriff said. "I can't see you, but I know who you are. You had better go home and——"

Crack!

The deputy fell from his horse into the middle of the road.

The other three men sat there on their horses, with every hair on their heads on end.

"Now, you three ride on, or it will be your turn next!" said that same girlish voice in the bushes.

"Don't shoot!" said one of the men, "and we'll go on."

"Very well; and if you ever come here again nothing on earth can save you!"

They went on, and when they had gone a little distance they rode as if for dear life.

"Come in here, Jim!"

Jim went into the bushes and was hugged by the intrepid girl.

"Did you think we would let 'em take you from us?" she asked him.

"I am sorry you downed him," he replied.

"Why?"

"Oh, they'll come and arrest all of you now."

"Well, they'll have a sweet time doing that," and she laughed merrily as she danced around him. "Can't you hide him where he can't be found?"

"Go on to the house and I'll see what I can do," and he started the girls off toward the house, and then gave the old signal for Bob to join him.

Bob was a quarter of a mile away at the time, but he heard the signal.

"Run to the house, Myra," he said to the young girl who was with him, "and I'll go and see who it is that calls me," and he returned the signal and hastened forward in the direction it came.

Myra was an impulsive, impetuous girl. She wanted to see who it was, too, and so she followed, keeping him in sight till he reached the creek.

There she saw him go into the bushes and the signals ceased.

Bettie saw her and ordered her to the house.

"Mind your own business," she retorted.

Then she saw her other sisters, and noticed that they had their guns.

"Is there any danger?" she asked.

"Yes, you goose. Come back and get your gun," and Bettie knew that would be enough. Myra was not afraid of anything when armed, but was just a little nervous when unarmed.

She ran back to the house with them and took down her rifle.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Wait to find out," Bettie replied, and she had to content herself with that.

When Bob reached Jim the latter had pulled the body of the dead man into the bushes and was searching his pockets.

"Great Scott, Jim!" he exclaimed in a low tone of voice, "what has happened? Who did that?"

Jim explained, and Bob said:

"This is bad business."

"Yes, and may get the girls into a good deal of trouble."

"We must take it away from here."

"Yes. I am thinking we ought to hide it here till dark and then throw it across our horses and take it some ten miles or so and drop it."

"That's the game," and they hid the body in the bushes and went up to the house to wait for supper and get their horses.

As soon as the stars were out they left the house and went down to the creek for the body.

CHAPTER IX.

JESSE MEETS THE DETECTIVE.

On leaving the others of the band, accompanied by Cole Younger, Jesse James rode off in a southerly direction.

The stars were shining brightly, yet in some parts of the road it was very dark, so much so that one could not see his hand a few inches before his face.

But it was a much traveled road and there were farm-houses all along on either side of it. They did not travel very fast as they were not familiar with the locality.

"I can't understand how that fellow kept track of us so well," Cole said to him as he rode along.

"He is a strange sort of man," Jesse said, "and I'd like to get somebody to put an end to him."

"I would be glad to get a chance to do it myself," said Cole.

"Yes, and so would I, but it seems to be a hard thing to do."

"But it should not be."

"No, but it is, though."

"Where are you going till Thursday?"

"I hardly know, but I am going to give Siroc a little rest if I can. All our horses need rest."

"Yes, they do."

"But that fellow Haynes puzzles me. Who would have dreamed of seeing him there at that hotel to-night with his armed posse?"

"I was never more astonished in my life," remarked Cole.

"No, nor I. It was lucky the landlord came outside and spoke as he did or we would have had a death struggle in the hotel."

"Yes, it was our rattlesnake this time, and it was just a little bit like his escape from us."

"Yes," and Jesse laughed. "Strange things happen sometimes."

They rode about ten miles and then stopped at a farm-house to inquire how far it was to the village.

"Just four miles," said the farmer.

"Is there a hotel there?"

"Yes, two of 'em."

"Is this the main road there?"

"Yes; you can't miss it."

They rode on, and Jesse remarked:

"That fellow didn't want to take us in."

"No—that was plain enough."

"Well, the farther we go to-night the farther ahead we'll be in the morning."

"Yes," and Cole indulged in a little chuckle, "and if we don't stop at all we will be ahead all the time."

They reached the village and found the hotel still open, as it was not a late hour.

"Can we get accommodations here for man and beast?" Jesse asked of the landlord, who came out in response to his call.

"Of course you can. That's what we are here for," was the jolly, good-natured reply.

"Show us the stable then, and——"

"Just alight and I'll have your horses attended to all right."

"Excuse me, but I regulate my horse's feed myself," Jesse returned.

"Just tell the boy how much you want him to have and——"

"Where is the boy?"

"Hyer, Tom! Take these horses and put 'em up and feed 'em just as the gentlemen tell you!" and a negro boy as black as Siroc himself came forward.

"Just lead the way to the stable," said Jesse as the boy caught hold of Siroc's bit.

He led the way, and Jesse and Cole both rode round the corner to a little shed in the cow pen.

"Is this the stable?"

"Yes, sah. De udder stable done got blown down by de cyclone."

"Where is the other hotel?"

"Dere ain't none, boss."

"Yes, there is. There's another hotel in this town. Here's a dollar. Tell us where it is," and he gave the boy a dollar as he spoke.

"Go right down dat street dar till yer sees four lights tergedder. Dat's de udder hotel," and the boy skipped out and disappeared around the corner, as if afraid of something or somebody.

Jesse and Cole rode down the street and soon saw four lights in a group.

"There's the four lights," said Cole.

"Yes. He told the truth after all."

They found the second hotel a decent sort of a place. It was kept by a widow, and her son was managing it for her.

"We want to feed our horses and ourselves," Jesse said to the young man.

"You can do so, sir," and the young man ordered his hostler to show them to the stable.

They fed their horses, rubbed them down, and gave them just enough and no more.

"Don't give 'em anything more," said Jesse to the hostler.

"Not in the morning?"

"No. We'll come and feed them in the morning ourselves," and he won the stableman's good will by a bit of money which he placed in his hands.

When they returned to the hotel they met the burly landlord of the other house, who had come up to them and said:

"You have insulted me, sir, and I demand an apology."

Jesse was astonished, and said:

"If I did I didn't mean to, sir. How did I insult you?"

"You came to my place and engaged accommodation, and then left without any explanation."

"You sent my horse to a shed in a cow pen instead of a stable. You owe me an apology—not me to you."

"You are a liar."

He came there to raise a row and got it, for Jesse very promptly knocked him down.

Two burly fellows rushed in to tackle Jesse. But Cole drew a revolver and said:

"Hands off! This is a free country, in which every man has a free show. I'll shoot if any man interferes."

The burly landlord rose to his feet and went at Jesse again.

Whack!

Jesse laid him out by a stunner on his left eye.

It dazed him, and when he got up it took him some little time to pull himself together.

Then he went at Jesse again like a savage bull.

But Jesse was handy with his fists, and in another minute he downed him again.

That settled him.

When he got up he started to leave.

"Hold on!" cried Jesse in a tone of voice that startled every one by its fierce command.

The man turned and looked at him.

"You must apologize to the landlord of this house for coming here and raising a row."

"I won't do it!" he growled.

Quick as a flash Jesse sprang at him and gave him another blow that staggered him.

By this time quite a number of people came running up.

One man started in to tackle Jesse.

"Hold on there!" cried Cole. "Stand back or you'll eat lead!"

"What have you to do with it?" the other demanded.

"Nothing at all, and neither have you. Stand back there!"

The man did stand back, and he stayed there, too, for Cole held a trump card in his hand in the shape of a big revolver.

Jesse then went for him again, and in the end compelled him to apologize to the young man for his conduct.

"Now get out!" he said to him. "If you have any friend who wants to take it up send him along and I'll settle him, too!" and he looked at the big fellow who wanted to interfere.

But that bully had made up his mind to let well enough alone, for he turned and went away with his friend.

"I want to thank you, sir," the young man said to Jesse. "That man wants to run this town, and since my father died he has insulted us often."

"Your mother is a widow, then?"

"Yes, sir, and my father was a soldier under Price and Van Dorn."

"Indeed! In what regiment?"

The young man told him.

"His name?"

"Joe Basselin."

"Joe Basselin—Joe Basselin! Why, I knew him in the army! He didn't serve all his time in that regiment. He and I were in the same company for nearly a year. Give me your hand, young man," and he shook hands with him in a very cordial way.

Cole did, too, for he recollected Joe Basselin very well.

"Tell your mother that one of Joe's best friends is in the house to-night, and that he would like to see her in the morning."

The crowd increased every minute, for the villagers wanted to see the man who had whipped Tom Bradley, the boss bully of the place. They crowded about the bar, and Jesse and Cole frequently set up the drinks for them.

It had been many a day since the little bar did such a thriving business and young Basselin was happy.

Jesse had given the name of Howard and Cole that of Jones, and they became the two most popular men in the town before night.

One man came to young Basselin at midnight and told him that Bradley and his friends were coming up to have it out with the two strangers.

"Tell him I'll prosecute him to the full extent of the law if he does," said the young man.

"Tell him I'll use lead next time," Jesse put in.

"That won't stop Tom Bradley," the man said. "He is as full as a goat of fighting whiskey."

"A bullet can stop all that," Jesse quietly remarked.

The man went away and Jesse and Cole continued to make merry with the villagers who had the courage to remain at the hotel with them.

By and by Bradley and a half dozen friends, all quite full of tanglefoot liquor, came up and called for Howard to come out and fight.

Jesse James and Cole stepped outside and two shots were fired at them.

That was enough.

They drew their terrible revolvers and opened fire.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

They never stopped but kept on:

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Bradley's friends took to their heels.

Bradley himself was lying on the ground or he would have gone with them.

Jesse had a bullet hole in his hat and Cole one through his coat sleeve.

Two of Bradley's friends were also hit.

Bradley was down with a broken leg.

"Do you want any more?" Jesse asked him from the door of the hotel.

"No; got enough," was the reply.

"I am not sure of that, as you are alive."

"Yes, I'm alive yet and hope to see you some other time."

"Send me word when you want to see me again," Jesse said, "and I'll come as soon as the sun rises," and he stepped inside the hotel.

Bradley's friends took him away, and the village doctor had his hands full that night and morning. There was little sleep in the village, as some of Bradley's friends swore great oaths of vengeance.

"What's the matter with the people of this village?" Jesse James asked one of the villagers. "Hasn't the widow any one to defend her among you? In any other respectable town the citizens would take him out and hang him. Hasn't any one else the right to run a hotel in this town? He came here and attacked me because we did not stop with him. On my soul I am sorry I did not kill him."

"So am I," added Cole.

That started the ball rolling and by morning there were many people in the place who were in favor of running the bully out of it.

Jesse and Cole slept till nine o'clock and then found the Widow Basselin in the dining-room to receive and thank them for defending her house the night before.

"My son tells me you knew my husband in the army."

"I knew a Joe Basselin well, ma'am," Jesse said. "He had a black eye, black mustache, and was as erect as an Indian, and could sing a song better than any man I ever knew."

"That was Joe! That was my Joe!" and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, he was so good to me. He loved me so."

"He was a brave, daring soldier, and we all loved him," and Jesse stepped up close to her, and said, in an undertone:

"He was with Quantrell for six months."

"Yes—yes, but don't breathe that to a living soul. You know how the people hated Quantrell's men."

"Yes, for I am a victim of that hatred to this day."

"But do they know you were one of his men?"

"Yes."

"And they don't molest you?"

"They do all they can, ma'am."

"Oh, it's awful, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"How do you keep 'em from killing you?" she asked.

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"Yes."

He leaned forward and whispered:

"I am Jesse James."

She started, turned pale, and gave him a most searching look.

"And Joe was my friend?" he added.

"Yes. I often heard him say he knew you well, and that you were driven to the highway because you had been with Quantrell."

"That was it—nothing more nor less. I am now going all the time to keep out of the way of pursuers."

"It is cruel."

"Yes, but all the world says I am the cruel one, and demand my blood. But I am not the one to submit to such injustice. If you wish it I will leave your house at once."

"Stay as long as you want to. I know what Joe would say if he were here. No one knows you here. But don't tell any one else who you are."

"Of course not—not even your son."

"No—not even my son," she said. "It's a secret that is safest with yourself. You can come here as often as you wish and stay as long as you wish, and I shall know you by no other name than that of Howard."

"I shall come only when I can do so without peril to you, and let me say here, that if the time should ever come when you need friends, let us know, and we will not fail you. If Bradley's friends give you any trouble, I'll see that they never repeat it."

Jesse and Cole remained there all day to see what would be the result of the row the night before. Some of Bradley's friends talked about pushing the law on Howard and Jones.

But the other citizens talked about giving the bully a coat of tar and feathers and a ride out of town on a rail.

That shut them up, and nothing more was said about law.

But all day long people dropped in to see the man who had downed Bradley, and the Basselins had to buy another barrel of whiskey for their little bar.

Suddenly the town received an accession of visitors in the persons of some twenty armed men.

They were the posse from Kearney, and Detective Haynes was at their head.

"Keep cool, Cole," Jesse whispered to his companion. "We are too well disguised for them to even suspect us."

They came in and called for dinner, and while it was being prepared for them they had many stories to tell of their experiences in the chase of the James Boys.

The villagers were again attracted to the hotel, and they stood around and gazed at the robber hunters all the afternoon.

The posse learned that Jesse James and his men had not been seen or heard of in the county.

"They are somewhere in this county," said Haynes.

"We have not heard of them if they are," said a citizen.

"No," said Jesse; "we have not heard of them in this county, and I have been traveling all over it for a week."

"They came this way," said Haynes. "I am sure of that."

"They went through in disguise then, and must have scattered, for we have heard nothing of them."

When the mail came that day a passenger reported that Jesse James and another of his band had held up a carriage on the main road that led from Darien that very morning.

"How far is Darien from here?" Haynes asked.

"About fourteen miles, and it's in the next county south of here."

"Did they get anything?" Jesse asked.

"I heard that they got all the valuables the old couple had with them."

Hal Haynes heard the story and was thinking of going over in that direction at once.

He had been told that Howard had made the bully of the place take water, hence was quite interested in him.

"I was once held up by Jesse James myself," Howard said, "and lost a diamond stud and \$200 in cash. It seems to me that you are wasting your time in running over the country after him with an armed posse at your back."

"Why so?" Haynes asked.

"Because he won't stop to fight your posse, and the movements of a body of armed men are always given away by the press and people, and thus the James Boys get hold of it. You can never catch 'em that way."

"How can they be caught then?"

"By shrewd detectives. Jesse James has already been taken twice, as has several of his band, and each time by detectives. The man can get a drop on him when a posse can't."

"I believe you are right," Haynes said, "but I am confident I can kill him or run him out of the State with these men I have with me."

"Possibly you can, but I don't believe it. You might worry him a good deal, and then he might take a notion to turn on you."

"Do you know he once captured me?" Haynes asked.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and they were going to hang me," and he told the story of his capture and escape.

"That shows his daring," said Howard. "Your best plan is to go in disguise and keep at him till you get the chance to get the drop on him and then hold him up."

During the time he was talking to him Jesse James looked him full in the eyes, noticed his teeth and every little mark on his face, in order to know him in any disguise he might appear in.

The best men at disguising can never change the expressions of the human eye. One who makes the eye a study can never be deceived by any change another may make in his appearance.

During the evening that followed the reception of the news of the hold-up of the carriage near Darien, the report reached them that Jesse James had held up a stage in another county on the same day—only two of them.

"One or the other is untrue," Haynes said, "and one is justified in doubting either story or both."

Howard glanced at Jones and smiled, and Jones smiled back at him.

"I think I can account for it," Howard said.

"How? I am unable to do so myself."

"The band has evidently scattered, and fragments of it are at work in different parts of the country. Just now, were you or I to hold up a man or a stage anywhere in this State, Jesse James would get the credit of it."

Haynes laughed and said:

"Hanged if I don't believe you are right there."

"So do I," remarked Jones.

"I am satisfied they have scattered and I am only waiting to get some definite news of Jesse James' whereabouts."

"You can never catch him with a posse; you have got to use the cunning of a fox instead of the brute strength of the lion. Find out his haunts and haunt them till you run across him. It is only a question of time when you can follow him to some place where you can hold him up and land him in jail."

During the evening Jesse saw the widow and gave her one hundred dollars, saying:

"I am going to try to catch that fellow Haynes and take him away. You must abuse me for leaving my board bill unpaid, though this pays it ten times over," and then he bade her good-by and told her not to forget what he had told her.

Once more he and Cole Younger were with Haynes in the bar room.

"Come round to the stable," he said to Jones in Haynes' presence. "I want to show you a horse that came in to-day. If he is not Jesse James' horse there are two alike in this world after all that has been said to the contrary."

"Have you any objections to my going with you?" Haynes asked.

"None at all. Come on," and they went out and made their way round to the stable.

The boy in charge was half asleep, and Jesse called to him to bring a light, as he wanted to look at the black horse.

The boy brought a lantern and Jesse gave him a note, saying:

"Take that to Judge Owens' house and wait for an answer," and he slipped money into his hand at the same time.

The boy hurried away and Jesse took up the lantern, saying:

"I didn't want him to hear us," and he led the way to the stall where Siroc was, holding the light above his head.

"By George, but he does look like Jesse James' horse!" exclaimed Haynes. "He came to-day, did you say?"

"Yes, this afternoon."

"I must keep a watch on him, and see the man who claims him. Hello! He has his saddle on, too!"

"Yes. That's what first excited my suspicions. Let's take him out and see if he has no spots on him anywhere."

Cole hacked him out of the stall, and Jesse and the detective looked him over with a great deal of interest.

"It's Siroc as sure as you live!" said Haynes, as he looked at the splendid animal.

Jesse sent the lamp down on the floor, and covered him with his revolver, saying:

"You are right. Hands up!"

He recognized his voice at once in that stern command, and his hands went up.

"Hold 'em out!"

He did so, and Cole put the irons on them.

Then they put him under a beam overhead, with a halter round his neck.

"There are no rattlesnakes here," Jesse said to him with a dry chuckle.

"No. You have played your game well," Haynes replied.

"Yes, I think I have; but I had to take the chances of being hypnotized, you know. Throw that over the beam there, Cole."

"Yes," and the long end of the halter was thrown over the beam.

"Now get up on this barrel."

But Haynes would not move.

"Get up!" and Jesse leveled his weapon at his head.

"Shoot! I'd rather be shot than hanged," was the cool reply.

Jesse seized him round the waist and stood him up on the barrel, while Cole drew the halter taut and fastened it to the post of one of the stalls.

"If you see a rattler now just skip out," said Jesse, as he sprang upon Siroc's back.

Cole mounted his horse and looked at Jesse for the signal to push the detective off the barrel.

"I don't know where you'll fetch up on the other side, Haynes," Jesse said; "but the chances are that we'll meet again," and with that he pushed him violently, and the barrel rolled from under him.

CHAPTER X.

HAL HAYNES AND THE BANDITS.

While Jesse James and Cole Younger were meeting with such stirring adventures in another county, Jim Cummins and Bob Younger had their hands full in the great forest near the house of the old moonshiner—Crouch.

They left the house after dark to go after the body of the man shot by Betty, with the intention of taking it to some point ten or fifteen miles away from the spot, in order to avoid any unpleasantness with the authorities.

When they reached the spot where they had placed the body they were amazed at finding it gone.

They looked about in the bushes for some time, and then Bob asked:

"Are you sure this is the place?"

"Yes, dead sure."

"Well, where is he, then?"

Jim produced his little pocket lantern, and flashed the rays around on the leaves.

"Yes, here are bloodstains where he was lying," he said.

"Yes, but where is he?"

"Tell me and I'll tell you," Jim replied.

"Was he dead?"

"I thought he was."

"He may not have been."

"True, and yet I think he was."

"Could the others have come back for him?"

"I don't know, and yet others may have been hidden round here and saw and heard all."

They both drew their weapons and made for the road, prepared to sell their lives dearly if attacked.

Then they mounted their horses and rode back up to the house.

Betty was surprised at seeing them return so soon, for she did not expect to see them again till the next day.

They told her what the trouble was, and she asked:

"If he was taken away we will all be arrested, will we not?"

"I don't know," said Jim.

"We had better see the old man," said Bob, "and hear what he thinks about it."

The old man and his two boys had come home from the woods, where they had been making moonshine whiskey, and they were in the house. Betty called the old man out and Jim told him what had happened.

"Wall, all we kin do is to deny everything an' wait."

"They may send a posse to arrest you all," Jim said.

"Wall, mebbe they'll try it, but they won't git us 'thout er fight," the old man replied.

"Of course; but they can send men enough to take every one of you," Jim said.

"But they didn't see me," Betty put in, "and that'll keep 'em from doing anything."

"They didn't see yer in ther woods?" the old man asked.

"No, they didn't!"

"I am sure they didn't," added Jim, "for I was out in the road with 'em."

"Then they won't do nothin'," the old man said, with a good deal of positiveness.

"Well, Bob and I will go out to the main road and see if we can hear of any posse coming this way."

"Yes, and let us know," Betty said.

They rode away and as they neared the creek both carried their weapons in their hands, in order to be prepared for any emergency that might arise.

They neither saw nor heard any one till they struck the main road some miles away from the creek.

Then they heard a party of horsemen coming toward them.

Going into the bushes they stopped to see who they were as they passed.

To their surprise they heard one of them telling about the capture of one of the James Boys over in the big forest, and how a woman, supposed to be the one he was with at the time of his capture, held them up and shot Dukes from his horse. When Dukes fell they made a break and got away.

They stopped right in front of the two bandits and discussed the question of going on to the place then or waiting for daylight.

It was finally decided to wait for daylight, and then they talked about running the Crouch family out of the county.

"Better not try that," said one.

"Why not?"

"It would cost twenty lives."

"It would?"

"Yes. They have eight or ten Winchesters and the girls know

how to use them as well as the old man and the boys. Besides, we could never get 'em out of those woods."

That was enough for Jim and Bob. They managed to keep quite near them while they were discussing the locality of a camp for the night.

Just as they were about to move on a man came along on foot and they stopped him.

"Hello!" cried one of the party. "It's Dukes as sure as I live!"

"Yes, it's me, boys," said the man, "and I'm nearly dead. Somebody shot me in the head, and when I came to I was lying in the bushes and it was night and my horse was gone."

"We thought you stone dead," said one of the men who had been with him when he fell from his horse, "and came to get help."

"The bullet hit me on the head and made a terrible gash. But I ain't dead yet, though I'm weak as a kitten," and he sank down on the ground.

Some one gave him some whiskey out of a flask and he felt better.

Then they held a discussion.

Dukes was not dead after all, so it was not necessary to stay there all night or to bother the Crouches the next day.

They put the wounded man on a horse and then started to return to Kearney.

"Well, said Jim, as soon as they were out of hearing, "all's well that ends well. I'm glad that fellow wasn't wiped out."

"So am I," replied Bob. "But that is not her fault. She shot to kill."

"Yes; there's no nonsense about Betty."

"Ain't you afraid she'll make trouble for you some day?"

"Yes, and she'll begin it soon, too, I fear. But Myra is worse than she is, any day."

"Think so?"

"She shoots like an old hunter and has an awful temper."

"But I think she would die before she'd do me any harm."

"Bah! Let her get jealous once and she'd shoot you as quick as lightning."

"Yes, I know she would."

"Been making love to her?"

"Oh, yes, and she said she'd marry me at any time I said so."

Jim laughed and remarked:

"I fear we are both doomed to be shot by women."

"Well, I hope not."

They rode out into the main highway and turned toward the river.

In the afternoon they came in sight of the old well where such mysterious things happened to the band one night.

"I say, Bob," said Jim. "Let's see the old well again and see if we can hear the songs of the dead coming up as we did on that night when Frank was so terribly demoralized."

"Yes, I'd like to find out something about that," Bob replied.

"Like Jesse I don't believe in the supernatural at all. Yet my hair rose on end that night as it never did before," and they rode into the field that had been left to grow up in weeds and grass and headed for the old well.

When Jesse James and Cole Younger dashed out of the stable on their horses, after pushing Detective Haynes off the barrel and leaving him hanging by the neck, they came within an inch of running over the stable boy.

He had returned unexpectedly, having met another to whom he gave the note the bandit chief had entrusted to him.

They did not see him as he dodged in the doorway just in time to save himself.

He gazed after them in wondering amazement for half a minute and then turned and saw that the lantern was lying on its side on the floor.

With a cry of dismay he sprang forward to seize it ere any oil could flow and ignite.

He snatched it up and drew a long breath of relief.

"Hello!" and he sprang aside.

The hanging man's feet had struck him, and he looked round and saw him.

"Oh, Lord!" he gasped.

But the next moment he whipped out a knife and cut the halter just above Haynes' head.

The detective sank to the floor in a heap, and the panic-stricken boy dashed out of the stable and made a break for the hotel.

"Oh, Lord!" he cried. "They's a man er-hangin' in de stable!"

"A man hanging in the stable!" repeated young Basselin.

"Yes, sah! I done cut him down. Oh, de Lord sabe us!"

The crowd ran to the stable to find Detective Haynes just beginning to pull himself together.

A physician was summoned and he was taken to the hotel.

The impression was that he had tried to commit suicide.

But when he told them that Jesse James and one of his men had hanged him, they were dumbfounded.

"Jesse James here!" they exclaimed.

"That man Howard was Jesse James," he said, and that was an-

other sensation, and in less than half an hour, the entire male population of the village had crowded in and about the hotel to hear the news.

It was the greatest sensation the little village had ever known, and the terror inspired by the name of the great bandit caused many nervous ones to sit up the whole night.

The doctor said that the stable boy had saved Haynes' life.

"Had he run out without cutting him down," he said, "he would have been dead long before the crowd got there."

"Yes, that's so," admitted every one in the town, and so the boy became the hero of the hour and received many tokens of appreciation from the citizens.

"Which way did they go?" members of the posse asked, and the inquiry went from mouth to mouth.

But no one could answer the query, hence pursuit was not to be thought of.

They did not care to pursue him in the dark, or to go without Haynes.

Mrs. Basselin and her son seemed to be as much astonished as any one else on hearing that Jesse James had been their guest.

"He never paid his bill," said the son; "but his row with Bradley was worth two hundred dollars to us, though, for we had a crowd all the time after that."

"Yes, but now people will want to drink with the man who had a fight with Jesse James," said one of his friends.

"Perhaps so, but I don't think he'll be able to stand up and drink with anybody for a couple of months yet."

But the crowd was at the hotel till midnight, and the posse was swearing that they would run down the bandits at all hazards.

"It was a close call, boys," Haynes said to the posse. "But I am alive yet, and in another day I'll be able to be in the saddle with you. I am going to have it out with him now. He hanged me, and it's not his fault that I am not a dead man. He played the game well."

"See here, Haynes," said one of the posse. "I heard him tell you that a posse was no good for catching the James Boys, and I think he was right."

"I guess he didn't want to have any posses after him," replied Haynes. "I think it good sense to do what your enemy doesn't want you to do."

"In war—yes. Had he come after you with all of his band, he would have had a nasty fight on his hands. But he was too sharp for that, eh?"

"It was an accidental meeting," said Haynes. "He didn't come here after me at all."

"No. You came after him and got caught yourself," and the man smiled. "I should think you'd see the point without any trouble at all."

"Oh, I see the point you are trying to make. But my posse has scattered the bandits, and now I am going to run them down."

"If they don't hang you," the man added.

"Yes, yes—if they don't hang me."

He wanted to go the next day, but the doctor told him he was not able to do so, and so he had to wait another day.

Then he started off, going southward, believing the bandits were trying to get him off their old stamping ground by going in that direction.

They reached a village and ascertained that two men, one on a superb black horse, had passed through there that morning.

"I am on the right track, then," he said, and they pushed on in the direction given, reaching another village late in the night.

By some strange coincidence he struck the right trail, and by noon the next day he came in sight of the black horse on the highway.

He turned to the others and said:

"I'll go on alone. One of you keep me in sight and the rest follow by keeping him in view. When I take out my handkerchief and blow my nose, waving it this way, it means that you are all to stop and wait for me to give further instructions. I'll make up a disguise, but you'll know my horse."

They understood him and he rode on quite leisurely, making a change in his make-up as he went. He kept them in sight for several miles, and he saw them look back at him a dozen times.

They finally stopped at a spring for a drink of water, and he came up, too.

"Is it good water, gentlemen?" he asked them.

"Very good," said Jesse James.

"I'll take a drink, then."

He dismounted and went to the spring where they were.

They eyed him closely, but returned his greeting courteously as he joined them.

"It's a hot day for horsemen," he said.

"Yes—a good one to rest under the shade."

"Indeed, it is. But when one has no time to rest he can't indulge in the luxury."

"No. How far are you going?"

"I am going through to Moundford, but will have to stop over at two places before I get there."

"I heard that some of the James Boys' band had been seen on this road," Cole Younger remarked.

"Oh, I am not afraid of them."

"Well armed, eh?"

"No, not armed at all."

"How is it you don't fear them, then?" Cole asked.

"Because I have nothing they would want."

"Oh! That's a good idea," and they both laughed heartily.

"Yes," Haynes added. "They'd starve to death robbing men like me."

"They might take your horse."

"They are not much in that line of business, I hear. It isn't so easy to get away with a horse. By the way, one of you have a horse there which I would not ride where I am not known for any amount of money."

"Why?" Jesse James asked.

"Because I'd be afraid of being taken for Jesse James. They say he has the finest black horse in the world."

"Yes, so I have heard, too," Jesse replied. "I have seen people stare at me as I rode along, but nobody has stopped me on account of the horse as yet."

"Ain't you afraid of trouble, though?"

"Well, I haven't given it much thought, to tell the truth. I go armed all the time, and if I meet any of that gang they'd have to get the drop on me if they got anything from me. Even then they would not be paid for their trouble."

They each took another drink of water and then mounted and rode on again.

Haynes saw that neither suspected him and so he rode on with them till they came to the next town. It was quite a pleasing looking village, and, as the sun was but an hour high, they decided to stop at the hotel there and wait for another day before resuming their journey.

Haynes immediately took out his handkerchief and gave the signal agreed upon.

Then he put up at the hotel with Jesse and Cole, and went back to the lower side of the village on foot to say to them that they were to stop at the other hotel, going in two at a time to avoid attracting attention.

When night came darkness enabled the posse to surround the hotel so as to prevent their escape.

During the evening six men came in on horses and put up at the same stable, and went to the same hotel where Jesse and Haynes were stopping.

"Let's have something to drink," said one of the newcomers, and Jesse gave a start.

It was Bob Younger's voice.

Jesse was surprised.

He gazed at the young bandit and saw a disguise so complete that he even doubted the voice.

But when Bob spoke again, he no longer doubted him.

Then he turned to scrutinize his companions, to find five others of the band with him.

He strolled round to where Cole was sitting, and told him of his discovery.

Cole was equally astonished.

"Yes," said Jesse, "there are eight of us now," and then they both went over to Bob and the others.

Cole easily recognized both his brothers by their voices.

Cummins and Hite were also recognized in the same way.

Jesse finally gave Cummins a grip that told him who he was.

Jim was overjoyed, and soon let the others know.

He took him up-stairs to a room to which he had been assigned, and told him that the posses had turned out in every direction, and that they had come away to get rid of them.

An hour passed, and then Hal Haynes decided that the time to make the arrest had come.

He had fourteen men out and around the hotel, and had given instructions to allow no man to leave after he went in.

Taking three men with him he walked into the hotel, and made his way to where Jesse and Cole were standing talking to Jim Cummins and several other of the bandits.

Leveling his revolver at Jesse's head, he said:

"Hold up your hands, Jesse James!"

Jesse was dumbfounded.

But he held up his hands.

Click! Click!

Revolvers were cocked all round him.

Every bandit drew and covered the detective and his aids.

"Drop that!" said Jim, "or down you go, old man!"

"Who—are—you?" Haynes asked.

"One of the band. We are all here!"

The three posse men tried to get away.

The others in the bar-room seemed to be almost paralyzed at seeing so many revolvers out.

The detectives were utterly broken up.

Haynes gave up his pistol and Jesse James took it.

Yet the bandit chief had not recognized in him the man he and Cole had hanged the evening they left him in the Widow Basselin's stable.

"Who are you?" Jesse asked.

Ere he could reply some one fired a shot and a terrible free fight ensued.

The posse had run in and precipitated the struggle.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Men shouted and swore, and those who were not engaged in the fight made frantic efforts to get out of harm's way.

They went out of doors and windows, and the crash of glass and their yells of dismay added to the general din.

In the struggle Jesse James struck the detective a terrible blow on the head with the revolver he had taken from him. He fell like a log and Jesse sprang out of the house, gave the old signal and every bandit followed him.

They rushed for the stable and got their horses.

"Saddle and mount!" sung out Jesse.

They lost no time in obeying the order.

Just as they sprang into the saddle, a number of the posse, with Haynes at their head, appeared at the stable.

"Kill 'em!" they cried.

"Shoot the villains!"

"Let none escape!"

"Shoot the man on the black horse!"

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Jesse James led the way as they dashed through them.

Several men were knocked down by the horses and others by bullets.

Yet the posse ran after them and fired as long as they could see them.

But the darkness soon shut out the view and the bandits got away.

Two miles outside of the village Jesse halted and asked:

"Anybody hurt?"

Two were hit, but they were slight flesh wounds.

"They gave us a surprise."

"Yes," returned Cole, and were in turn very much surprised themselves.

"Yes. They didn't know that others of the band had come in."

"It was a lucky thing for us."

"Yes, so it was."

"Of course. He would have had us."

"Who was he?"

"Hanged if I know. If we had not hanged Haynes I would have sworn I heard his voice in that crowd."

"So would I," put in Cole. "I am puzzled, for I am sure I did hear his voice."

"That's strange we both should have heard it. It can't be he escaped."

"Of course not. Just one or two minutes were enough to finish him. We'll never see him again."

"It is strange we both should have heard his voice."

"Yes, but that is because we heard a voice that was like his, just as we see faces that resemble each other. Now let's hear about the other posses."

"They are out in every direction," said Bob Younger. "Jim and I went to the old well and they came down on us there. We had bullets whistling all about us, and had to skip out lively. Frank and Wood and the others were fired on over on the river road, and we met them flying for their lives. It begins to look as if the State had turned out after us."

"Well, we'll have to give 'em the slip," Jesse said, "and lie under cover till the excitement dies out."

"It won't do to get under cover anywhere in this part of the State," said Jim Cummins. "Everybody is on the lookout for us, and we'd be on the move all the time, with bullets whistling around us like flies."

"Then we'll leave the State for a few weeks," Jesse replied. "We are well provided with cash, and a trip beyond the border may do us good."

"All go together?" Jim asked.

"Yes."

"Wouldn't it be safe for us to scatter and let each look out for himself?"

"We have been trying that for some days, and each have been trailed until we had to flock again. If we go together, we may be able to hold our own."

"We must hide in the woods till we cross the State line and travel only at night."

CHAPTER XI.

CHASED DAY AND NIGHT.

Scarcely had Jesse James made the suggestion to leave the State ere the sound of horsemen on the road startled them. The posse was after them, and they turned and fled along the highway, keeping well ahead of their pursuers.

They were going to turn into the woods as soon as they struck a place that would afford them shelter.

"Hello! Here comes another crowd!" cried Jim Cummins, as he heard horsemen in front.

"Play posse on them!" suggested Jesse, who rode in front to meet them.

"Halt!" came from the posse.

"Good!" cried Jesse. "Glad to meet you. The whole James Boys' band are behind us in hot pursuit. They outnumber us two to one. Quick! Get behind those trees there and we can wipe 'em out."

The leader of the posse never thought to look into the matter at all.

He heard the others coming up the road, and at once ordered his men into the woods.

They quickly obeyed, and in less than a minute they were in the bushes with ready weapons, waiting for the pursuing posse to come up.

When they did come up they, too, were ready to give fight, for Haynes had told them that the bandits might attempt to ambush them.

"Halt!" came the stern command from the bushes.

Crack!

Crack!

Cr-r-r-rack!

The pursuing posse blazed away into the bushes, wounding a number of the other one, and a terrible hand-to-hand fight occurred, during which the bandits slipped away unperceived.

"Kill every bandit!" cried Haynes. "Take no prisoners! End the James Boys here and forever!"

"Why, we are not the James Boys!" cried one of the others.

"Who are you?"

"The sheriff's posse!"

"Hold up, men! Hold up—these are friends!" cried Haynes, and the firing at once ceased.

Of course they soon found out that a terrible mistake had been made, in which nearly a dozen men had been wounded.

"You say a party of eight men told you the James Boys were just behind them in hot pursuit?" Haynes asked of the deputy sheriff.

"Yes, and as we heard you coming we had no time to investigate. Had you not fired so quickly the mistake might have been found out in a few minutes."

"Yes, yes—no doubt. But we took you for the James Boys and fired, for we knew they were just ahead of us."

"They were the James Boys then?"

"Yes. Where did they go?"

"They came into the bushes with us. They must have slipped away during the firing."

"They can't be very far off then?"

"No," and they looked about to see if they could find any traces of the bandits.

But starlight is a poor light for such work, and so they could find no traces of them.

"They have gone on ahead," Haynes said. "You can bet on Jesse James getting out of a scrape like a sneaking coward if he can, Mr. Sheriff. I am following him to the death. Four of my men are wounded. Are you going to follow him any further?"

"I must look after my wounded," was the reply.

"Will you look after mine also?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then come on, boys. We'll give 'em no chance to rest."

The Kearney boys sprang into the saddle again and started off up the road.

Jesse James and his bandits rode hard for some miles and then slackened their speed.

They passed a farm-house where a farmer was on guard to shoot thieves who were trying to get his horses. The farmer saw them but they did not see him.

When Haynes came by he suspected that something was wrong and he hailed him.

"We are after the James Boys," the detective said.

"Fight men went by on horseback a few minutes ago."

"They were the James Boys."

The farmer was astonished.

Haynes rode on, and when he came to a cross-road he dismounted, struck a match and looked to see if the bandits had turned out in that direction.

By that means he kept well up behind them.

About daylight he found a spot where they had gone into a deep woods.

But he rode on as if he did not see the trail, and a half mile beyond went into the woods himself with his men and put out guards to look out for their foragers.

It was not long ere Bob and Wood came out and started for the nearest farm-house.

Four of the posse followed and concealed themselves in ambush to wait for their return.

In an hour or so they came along, and were held up by the four.

"Who are you?" Wood demanded, as they came out of the bushes.

"We'll tell you about that later."

"But I want to know."

The four men kept them covered with revolvers.

"Are you the James Boys?" Wood demanded.

"Yes," replied one of the men with a grin. "Got any money?"

"No—only a few dollars. I—I'll give you every cent," and he started to put his hand in his pocket as if for his money.

"Hands up!"

Up went his hands again.

"Keep 'em up till you are told to take 'em down!"

"Yes—yes—oh, Lord—the James Boys!" and he glared at the four men with a well-forged expression of horror on his face.

But they were not deceived.

The leader went up to Wood with a pair of handcuffs, and said:

"Hold out your hands now!"

Wood held out his hands, for another man was aiming a revolver at his head.

In a moment he was a helpless prisoner, and half a minute later Bob was in the same fix.

"Now, come in here," said the leader, as he went back into the woods.

They were led into the bushes and searched.

Over \$10,000 were found on each of them, and a brace of revolvers.

"Ah! we didn't make any mistake."

The four men were dumbfounded at finding such a prize.

"Let's hang 'em and say nothing about the money," suggested one of them.

"Yes," said another. "It is the way they do."

It was finally agreed on, and the two prisoners were led further back into the woods to be hanged.

"Now, look here," said Wood Hite. "I see what you fellows are. You have got us dead to rights. We belong to the James Boys. You have got our pile, and that makes \$5,000 apiece for four of you. Your game is to hang us and say nothing about the money, and thus be that much in. That makes you good James Boys' men every time."

"Bah!" said one of the posse.

Wood smiled and went on:

"Now, if you'll dispense with the hanging I can put you in the way of getting another \$5,000 as easily as you got ours."

"Well, that goes to the right spot. Let's hear what the plan is."

"Let us go back and we'll send two more to the farm-house for food. Every member has ten thousand dollars on him."

"But will you send them?"

"Yes."

"Can't trust you. We'll keep one of you and let the other go. If he does not do it we'll hang one, anyhow. You may draw straws to see who goes."

Wood said that wasn't his plan.

"No, but it's ours, though. Take it or hang."

"Oh, we'll take it."

Two straws were held out to them.

"The longest goes," said the leader.

Wood drew it.

Bob knew the game and had no fears but that Wood Hite would see that he was not left to hang.

He was freed and allowed to go back to the bandits.

Jesse was aroused from his sleep and told what had happened.

"Bob is held by a posse, Bob," the bandit chief said to Bob's eldest brother.

Wood told them the conditions on which he had been permitted to return.

"You got out of it well, Wood," Jesse said. "We'll see if we can't rescue Bob and get back that money. Jim Younger and Frank can go along the road and the rest of us will get behind that piece of woods and give those honest posse men a little bit of a surprise."

Frank and Jim started out and Jesse and the others, guided by Bob, made haste to get into the rear of the four posse men.

Jim and Frank were very promptly held up and pulled into the woods.

But ere the handcuffs were placed on them Jesse and the other bandits burst in upon the party and held them up.

"Hello, Jesse!" exclaimed Bob. "Just in time!"

The four posse men were searched, every penny taken from them, their clothes cut into shreds and they left en naturalibus in the woods.

"Now come on, boys," Jesse said as he left them. "They will have to go hunting for clothes before they hunt for us any more," and with many a laugh at the expense of the posse they returned to their horses, ate the breakfast Bob and Wood had brought from the farm-house, and then skipped out by way of a lane that led directly away from the main road.

It made Haynes almost crazy when he heard that his four men had been captured and their clothes destroyed by the James Boys.

They did not tell him the game they had played and how they had lost in the end.

It was a far different story he heard.

They said the entire band had surrounded and held them up, and, as a matter of course, he believed them.

But it reduced his numbers below that of the James Boys if he went on and left them behind for lack of clothes.

He could not do that, and so they rode on to the nearest village and bought clothing for them, bringing them back to where they fought flies in the woods.

The James Boys gained a whole day by the trick. They stopped at a negro cabin about noon and bought a meal for themselves and then went into the woods to sleep till the stars came out.

Then they resumed the journey and got into another big road and pushed on in a northerly direction, traveling all night long and reaching a little town just after sunrise.

"We need not fear any posse here," Jesse said. "We are out of their range now and can take our meals at any hotel."

"But Siroc will make trouble for us," suggested Cole.

"No, I think not."

"I am sure of it."

"Better leave him in the woods till we have had breakfast," suggested Bob.

"I would rather lose the meal than have him do so. I'll take the chances," and he rode into the village with them.

It was so early in the morning that few people noticed them, and the black horse went to the stable with the others.

They had their breakfast and then sat around to smoke and give their horses a chance to rest.

Jesse went into the reading-room and picked up a paper with which to pass away an hour.

To his amazement he saw an account there of the hanging and rescue of Hal Haynes, the famous detective, who was now making it hot for the James Boys, in the stable of the hotel.

"Ah! He is alive yet," he muttered, as he looked at the account, "and it's he who is pushing us so hard. I am afraid of that fellow, and I can't understand why I did not stand by and wait till he was dead before I left. Well, if I ever get hold of him again I'll put the muzzle of a revolver against his head and pull the trigger. Even then I may meet him again. The fellow has more lives than a cat."

Jim Cummins came in, and Jesse showed him the piece in the paper without any comment.

"He's a lucky dog," Jim said, as he handed back the paper.

"Yes, and a wonderful fellow."

They were soon ready to remount and resume their trip.

It was agreed that they should ride a few miles out of town, and then go into the woods for the rest and sleep they dared not take at the hotel.

When about four miles out from the town they saw a large four-horse stage coming toward them.

"There's a chance for a little business, boys," the bandit chief said.

"Yes," put in Cole Younger, "a good chance to get into jail."

"How so?" Bob asked.

"Our horses are in no condition to carry us in a hot chase."

"Oh! We'll get into some woods and take a rest."

"We'll hold it up, anyhow," said Jesse James. "Come into the bushes and wait for it. I'll leave Siroc out of sight."

"Let's all dismount," suggested Jim Cummins, and they did.

They drew on their black masks and waited for the stage.

When it came up, the eight masked men darted out in front of it and—

"Halt! Steady there, driver!"

Jesse James had a voice that, once heard in stern command, was never forgotten.

"That's Jesse James' voice!" exclaimed a man inside the stage "I've heard it before."

Two women began screaming, and the horses grew restless.

Bob and Wood seized the bits of the two foremost horses and held them firmly.

"Stop that noise in there and get out!" said Jesse.

Four men got out.

"Hold up your hands till we are through with you," he ordered, and they held them up.

He went to the door of the stage and found three women in there, two of whom were screaming at the top of their lungs.

"What's all this fuss about?" Jesse demanded, and they ceased for a moment.

But the moment they saw his black mask they began again.

The two screamers got out, but they never once let up in their vocal exercises till Jesse exclaimed, savagely:

"If you don't stop that noise I'll shoot you!"

Then they shut up instantly.

The men were searched and yielded up a good dividend.

But the two screamers had little or no money or jewelry.

"What in thunder were you making such a fuss about?" he asked of the elder of the two.

"I—I—was frightened, sir."

"I can't understand why a woman with a pretty mouth should yell so."

She had an awful big mouth and the passengers smiled at the remark.

"I am very nervous, sir."

"Yes, and the more noise you make the more nervous you are."

"Are you Jesse James?" the younger screamer asked.

"Lord, no! Jesse James is three hundred miles from here, I reckon."

"I know you, Jesse James," said one of the male passengers.

Jesse turned on him and hissed:

"Do you mean to say I am Jesse?"

The man saw a gleam in the eyes that he didn't like.

"Well, I thought you were when I first heard your voice, but I guess I am mistaken."

"You have guessed right. If there is one man on earth whom I hate it's Jesse James, and some day I hope to have the pleasure of shooting him. You may all get back in the stage and go on now."

They got in at once, and in a little while it was off like a thunder-bolt.

When it was out of sight the bandits mounted their horses and made their way through a long lane to a great forest on the north side of a creek.

There they found a good place to rest and sleep, and a wheat field on the right afforded pasture for their horses.

They found that the stage passengers had panned out quite well, and they had four extra gold watches on hand. A division was made and the watches were to be sold.

In the evening they set out again and got out of the State.

They breathed freer when they found they were out of Missouri.

"I don't think we shall have any more trouble now," Jesse said, as he rode along the highway.

"That stage business will give us trouble," Cole said. "That fellow who knew your voice will swear it was you and the world will believe him."

"Well, they didn't see any black horse, and people don't know which way we have gone."

"We'll see," and they pushed on all night long, striking a village just about daylight.

Not a soul was to be seen in the place as they rode through. It seemed to be utterly deserted, for everybody was in bed at that uncanny hour.

As they rode through they saw a large hotel, and Jesse decided to stop and have a square meal for man and beast.

"Let's find the stable and call up the hostler," he said.

The stable was soon found and the stableman aroused from his sleep.

"Give these horses stalls and a square meal," Jesse said to him, "and it's money in your pocket."

"Do you belong to the circus?" the boy asked.

"Yes," Jesse replied.

The boy hustled.

"I wonder what he means by that question?" Jesse asked of Bob in a whisper.

"Circus coming here, I reckon."

"Ah, yes."

They soon learned that a circus was to reach the town that day.

"There will be a crowd here, and our presence will not be noticed," Jesse said. "We'll stop and get a rest."

They stayed about the stable till the hotel was open, and then went there for breakfast.

They were fortunate in securing rooms, and after a hearty meal went to bed.

When they awoke at noon the town was alive with people, and the band-wagon was going through the streets with music and banners.

The hotel was crowded and the stable full of horses of every description.

Jesse went to the stable to see if Siroc was being noticed.

He saw a half dozen or more black horses there, and as they stood in the stalls no one attracted any attention.

Satisfied that he had nothing to fear on that score, he returned to the hotel and sat down in a chair on the piazza to look at the people who had come in from the country.

"This is a rest indeed," he said, as he lighted a cigar and proceeded to enjoy a smoke.

"Yes," assented Jim, "if it will last."

"It will last. We are like a needle in a haystack in this crowd here to-day. They can't find us even if they look for us."

People came in every minute and in every conceivable style of conveyance. It was interesting to look at them as they came and went. Jesse was looking at the procession when a dozen men rode up and dismounted in front of the hotel.

He did not notice them, as he was watching a negro and a balky mule at the time.

"Great Scott!" gasped Cole. "If that isn't Haynes I am a double-headed ghost!"

"Where?"

"Right out there—a dozen of 'em!"

Jesse looked and recognized the famous detective, who was being told by the landlord that he could feed him and his men, but could not lodge them.

Jesse was pale as a sheet.

He feared that man above all others.

Rising quickly, he gave a low signal to Frank, who was standing near, and passed into the house.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLOSE CALL FOR THE DETECTIVE.

In the hotel were half a hundred men, some of whom had been too frequently at the bar.

But that did not prevent the bandits from gathering around their chief to hear the cause of the alarm he had given.

"Haynes and his posse has just arrived," he said to them. "They are in front of the hotel now. Follow me to the stable, one at a time and ten feet apart," and he went out, leading the way.

Cole was the first to follow and Jim Cummins went next.

As he went out Cole almost brushed against Haynes, and the detective looked hard at him, as though struck by some resemblance in his features.

Cole appeared not to notice him, and went on.

But ere he was half way to the stable he found the detective walking alongside of him staring him in the face.

"Do you live here, sir?" Haynes asked.

"I live out about four miles, sir," was the reply, and Cole turned and faced him boldly as he spoke.

"Excuse me, but you look very much like a man I know."

"That often happens, said Cole, as he walked along.

"Yes—very often. Are you acquainted here?"

"Oh, yes. I know almost everybody here."

"Can you tell me where I can find stable room for several horses? The town is so full of people we can't even get feed for ours."

"Well, there are a number of private stables here, of course, but whether they will be bothered with other people's horses is more than I can say. The only way to find out is to go round to them and find out."

"Yes, of course," and the detective turned and made his way back to the hotel, while Cole hurried on to the stable.

Bob hastened to the stable and said:

"I think he is going to give us trouble, as he went back in quite a hurry, as if to call his men to horse again."

"Keep cool and get into the saddle as quick as you can," Jesse said. "If they attack us every man of you open fire on him till you see him fall. After that obey orders."

They had a quick way of saddling their horses, gained from an active experience for years, and so, in an incredibly short space of time, they were in the saddle.

Jesse led the way and rode out into the street with a quiet demeanor that was far from suggesting peril to himself or any one else.

The others straggled along behind him. There were too many others for such an army to attract any particular attention.

He led the way so as to avoid going by the hotel.

It was his policy to avoid a fight whenever he could, and this was one of the times when he wanted to sneak away unperceived.

But he was not destined to get off that way.

Haynes happened to look toward the stable and saw Cole on his horse and the black horse just ahead of him.

The presence of the black horse removed all doubts from his mind like a flash.

"To horse, men!" he cried. "The James Boys are here!"

The posse rushed out to their horses and sprang into the saddle.

"See that man on the black horse out there—and the man on the roan behind him! That's Jesse James and one of his men. Shoot 'em down—charge!"

Jesse and his bandits were about two hundred yards away.

They heard them coming, and the black horse shot forward like a rocket.

Crack!

Crack!

Cr-r-rack!

Every man fired at the rider of the black horse.

To the utter amazement of the posse, a half dozen men began shooting at them.

Some were hit, and others were thrown into confusion by their horses becoming unmanageable.

"The James Boys—the James Boys!" was the cry that went from hundreds, as the news flew from mouth to mouth.

The bandits went thundering through the town, and but two or three moments only were necessary to put them beyond the sound of their voices.

The posse dashed after them, and they, too, were soon out of sight of the people in the town.

Both bandits and posse had jaded steeds.

But the detective believed that his horses had as much bottom as any of the others had, save the black horse. So he pushed on and urged his men to do their utmost.

The bandits rushed along the road, but could not get out of sight of their pursuers, try as hard as they would.

On, on came the indomitable detective, the foam flying from his iron gray.

"Ah! If we had Winchesters now," he exclaimed, "we could pick 'em off as we ride. Make one more dash, boys, and maybe we can get in range of them!"

They made the effort.

But, like the bandits, they had ridden all night, and both horse and rider were equally worn out. They could not gain an inch on them.

Suddenly the bandits were seen to dodge into the woods on the right.

"Ah! They are goin to make a stand and fight! Be careful, boys. Dismount and go in," and the intrepid detective flung himself from his horse and plunged into the woods about one hundred yards below the point where the bandits went in.

One man remained to take care of the horses and the others followed the detective.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

They were popping away at each other in the woods, and the man who was guarding the horses was trembling with excitement as he listened.

Crack!

Crack!

There came loud shouts from one side.

But from which he could not make out to save his life.

Suddenly two men emerged from the woods, and, aiming their revolvers at his head, ordered him to dismount.

He obeyed quickly.

Then they took off the bridles, cut them to pieces and stampeded the horses.

The animals dashed away up the road, and the two men disappeared in the woods again.

Some ten or fifteen minutes later the bandits dashed out of the woods on their horses and rode away.

They were between the posse and their horses.

Hal Haynes called his men to horse only to find his horses gone!

The man in charge told the story of their capture.

Haynes was dumbfounded.

"They have beaten us!" he exclaimed. "We are on foot and they in the saddle. Ten thousand curses on the luck! That villain of a Jesse James bears a charmed life! Let's go back to town and buy fresh horses. I'll draw for money through the bank for all that is needed."

They turned and made their way to the town again, reaching there a little before sunset.

The story of how the James Boys had gotten the best of them created quite a sensation.

But every one seemed to breathe freer when he heard that the bandits had gone on farther away from the town.

Haynes went to one of the wealthiest men in the town and showed him certain papers. The citizen agreed to buy him all the horses he wanted, and at once sent out a half dozen men in quest of good horses.

In an hour's time the horses were on hand.

But saddles and bridles caused a delay till noon the next day.

By that time, Haynes calculated, the bandits were at least forty or fifty miles away.

The railroad was but seven miles away, and he learned by wiring to the agent at the station that a cattle car could be attached to the regular passenger train in an hour from the date of the dispatch.

He hurried there and got the horses on board the cattle car.

It was an unusual thing to do, but the president of the road had given all employees orders to aid in every way the capture of the train robbers.

Two hours later they reached a little town fifty miles up the road. They got off there and went to the hotel, to remain till they could hear from the bandits.

"They are coming this way," said Haynes, "and if they don't strike this town they will come pretty close to it."

"Yes," added one of the men. "This town is right in their way. They will come this way unless they decide to turn and go back."

"They won't decide to do that yet awhile, I am sure," said the detective. "So we'll wait here till we hear from them."

It was then in the middle of the afternoon, and the posse kept their horses in the stalls with their saddles on them, so as to be ready for instant use.

About sunset a man rode up on a sorrel horse, which appeared to be very jaded, as if he had been ridden very hard, and inquired if he could get meals for himself and horse.

"Yes," said the landlord. "That's what we are here for."

He dismounted and turned his horse over to the stable boy.

Then he went in and registered as John Bowles from Racine, after which he went to the bar and took a drink.

Haynes had changed his make-up, and was on the lookout.

He did not recognize the newcomer as one he had ever seen before, and so lost interest in him very quickly.

By and by another solitary horseman arrived and went through the same course of movements.

Then a third, and a half hour later five came in a bunch.

That made eight men, and Haynes knew there were just that many in Jesse James' present force he was after.

He slipped out and went to the stable to see if a black horse was among the new arrivals.

There was no black horse there and that settled it.

It was not Jesse James' crowd—so he said—and he returned to the hotel.

He had scarcely entered the house ere two more men arrived on horseback.

"Do you often have so many men on horseback, landlord?" he asked of the host.

"Very seldom," he replied, "though a half dozen animals is a frequent occurrence. I am always glad to have 'em come."

"Yes, I should say so."

It was along toward eleven o'clock when Haynes decided to pay another visit to the stable.

He found it closed and locked.

That was a back set, but he found a place where he could crawl through, and he did so.

He had a dark lantern with him, and he used it to inspect every horse in the stable.

Not one was black.

Nor could he recognize any one there.

He counted them, and even failed to find any comfort there.

"I guess they are all right," and he put out the light and proceeded to climb through the aperture again.

Just as he landed on his feet he was given a stunning blow on the head that stretched him senseless on the ground.

When he came to he was lying on the ground with his hands tied behind him.

A bright fire was burning some ten feet away, and eight men were sitting around it smoking pipes and laughing and joking.

A glance told him he was in the woods and that the James Boys had him again.

He recognized them, for now they were not disguised at all, and his own disguise had been removed.

"They have me at last," he thought to himself, "and are waiting for me to come to in order to have some fun with me. I guess my time has come at last. I have been a failure from the word go in this case, though I did force them to leave the State."

Just then Bob Younger jabbed a pin in the calf of his leg to see if he was yet conscious.

Quick as a flash he raised his foot and gave the young bandit a kick that sent him rolling over on his back.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good!" cried Jim Cummins, who was sitting next to Bob.

The others laughed heartily, but Bob was as mad as a hornet.

He sprang to his feet and exclaimed:

"Blast your ugly picture, take that!" and he gave him a tremendous kick on the hip.

"Ah! What a brave man you are!" Haynes exclaimed, sarcastically. "Tie a man up and stick pins in him and kick him! Lord, what contemptible stuff you must be made of! Help me up on my feet and I'll kick you around like a dog."

"We'll see about that!" exclaimed Bob, lifting him up on his feet. "There you are—now kick me!"

They began kicking, and the way they jumped around caused the bandits to roar with laughter.

"Jump high and kick him on the head, Bob!" cried Cummins.

"Kick the stuffing out of him!" sang out Wood Hite.

"Give him one in the mouth!" yelled Jim Younger.

Suddenly the bound prisoner made a dash for the woods and ere the bandits could draw a weapon or even realize that he had given them the slip he was out of sight in the intense darkness of the woods.

A howl of rage went up from them, and every man drew his revolver and fired into the bushes after him.

Crack!

Crack!

C-r-r-rack!

Each man kept firing till he had emptied his revolver, making forty-eight bullets sent after him.

Then they put in fresh cartridges and went in search of his bullet-ridden body.

They used their dark lanterns in the search, but failed to find any traces of him.

Then the bandit chief gave vent to his wrath in terrible imprecations.

"It is your fault, Bob!" he exclaimed, turning on the young bandit. "I've a mind to hang you in his stead. You must stand him up, and kick with him like a boy! You ought to be shot for a fool!"

They trembled before him as slaves are said to tremble before some Eastern rulers when enraged. Never before had they seen him in such a towering passion.

Bob made no reply to his cutting comments.

To provoke him further would be tempting fate itself, and he wisely kept his mouth shut.

They sat down on the log near the fire to wait for his wrath to cool.

Half an hour later he said:

"We must go again. What a pack of fools we are! How he must be laughing at us now! We brought him two miles to hang him and then let him escape us! To horse, and let's be off! He has fresh horses and will be after us by sunrise! He has chased us nearly a thousand miles, till even Siroc, the king of horses, is wearied!"

They went to their horses and led them out to the road. Springing into the saddle they rode away under the silent stars, angry, wearied and discouraged.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BANDITS CROWDED TO THE WALL.

On finding himself free from the bandits, Hal Haynes was almost beside himself with joy. Up to just half a minute before he made the break for liberty, he had not a scintilla of hope. He had made up his mind to die taunting them with cowardice.

Now he was out of their grasp once more, though his hands were securely bound behind his back. Thanks to the darkness in the woods, he was able to get entirely beyond their reach.

The bullets they had sent after him flew thick about him. But he seemed to bear a charmed life, for not one touched him, and in another moment he had swerved to the right and thus got out of range.

He heard the mad ravings of the bandit chief, and was in hopes he would shoot the young villain who had aroused him to such a pitch.

At last he thought it best to get as far away from them as possible, and so began slowly picking his way through the woods.

His hands being tied behind him he had to feel his way with his feet. That was slow traveling, but he was not discouraged.

By and by he struck a fence and saw an open field beyond it.

But he could not climb it.

He never before thought how helpless a man was with his hands tied behind him.

He turned his back to the fence and tried to kick it down.

Then the thought occurred to him that the noise he was making might guide the bandits in pursuit of him.

Stopping and listening, he soon became convinced that they were not trying to find him in that intense darkness.

Then he resolved to follow along the fence and see if an exit could be found.

It was slow progress, but he thought it all the safer.

By and by he reached the roadside where there were no fences. It was the field not the woods that was inclosed.

Fearing the bandits might be guarding the road, he stood still in the bushes and listened.

He heard horsemen coming.

Shrinking farther back into the bushes, he stood and almost held his breath as they passed by.

They were talking, and he recognized Jesse James' voice.

There were eight horsemen.

He could see that many dark shadows go by, and knew the bandits were going.

The reaction of his emotion was so great, he would have fallen had he not leaned heavily against a tree.

"Lord, but it was a narrow escape!" he exclaimed. "I don't know where I am, but if I go in the opposite direction to that taken by them I will be all right, I think," and he emerged from the woods and hastened along the road at as rapid a pace as he could with his hands bound behind him.

He went about two miles and then found himself entering the little town. As soon as he saw the railroad station he recognized it and had no trouble in finding his way to the hotel.

It took a good deal of kicking on the door to wake up the clerk.

But he was finally admitted.

The clerk recognized and released him.

"Who tied you up?" the clerk asked.

"Jesse James, and I made a narrow escape."

"Why, has Jesse James been here?"

"Yes, his entire band has been here all day," and he told him which was Jesse's name on the register.

It nearly paralyzed him.

He went up to his room and went to bed, telling the clerk to keep the matter a secret until he could get up and go in pursuit.

When he came down-stairs the next morning only half of his posse had awakened.

He ordered them called, and had an early breakfast started for them.

When he got his men together he told them what had happened the night before, and added:

"Their horses are worn out. We can wind them up in a very few days now. They are the worst used up men you ever saw."

The posse were amazed.

"What sort of a detective are you, Mr. Haynes?" one of them asked, "to stop half a day in a hotel with the James Boys and then let 'em walk off with you like that?"

"I was suspicious, and was trying to find out when I was downed."

"Yes, but a good detective would not be downed as you were."

"The best in the land have been sent against him," said Haynes, "and I don't know that I have done any worse than any other."

"You have done better than any that I know of," said one of the posse. "You have run 'em out of the State and chased 'em nearly a thousand miles. That's better than any other has done."

"Yes, that's so," assented another. "I think we ought to be proud of what we have done."

The member who had found fault took back what he had said.

They mounted immediately after breakfast and dashed out of the town in hot pursuit of the bandits, and rode steadily, keeping an eye on the cross roads and woods, making inquiry at every farm-house to see if anybody had stopped there for breakfast that morning.

They soon found a farmer who had sold breakfast to two men on foot and who had bought extra meals for two days, which they took away with them.

"Which way did they go?" Haynes asked.

The farmer pointed up the road in the direction the posse had just come.

He knew then that they were in the woods somewhere back there, and he made up his mind to go on and wait for them in the next woods a mile or two beyond the farmer's place.

"Now, men," he said to his posse, as soon as he found a piece of woods that suited him, "we are to wait for them here in this woods. They will come along as soon as the stars are well out. They are robbers and murderers, and we must show them no mercy. At the word of command every one of you fire and make sure of your man."

"Without halting them?" one asked.

"Yes. Halt 'em with a bullet."

"What if a mistake is made and an innocent party is fired into?"

"It would be bad for the innocent party, but we hope that we have discretion enough to avoid making such a mistake."

"Better halt 'em first."

"We did that once and got fired into for our pains."

"That's so," said another.

"I'll shoulder the responsibility for any mistakes if you will obey orders. Don't fire till I order, and then be sure you shoot to hit."

They agreed to obey orders, and then went to work to get into

good positions near the roadside and where they could find shelter behind a huge log.

Two hours after sunset they heard a body of horesmen coming from the direction they expected the James Boys to come.

When opposite the ambush the detective sung out:

"Halt! Fire, men!"

C-r-r-rash!

It was a crash.

The horsemen dashed forward at full speed except one.

A horse rolled in the dust of the road, and when they went out to where he was kicking they found no rider with him.

"We are poor shots to say the least," Haynes remarked.

"Did you shoot?" one of his men asked him.

"Yes, and I don't know that I did any better than you did."

"We may have hit half of 'em," said one.

"Yes, and from the fact that they didn't fire back at us I am inclined to think we did hit some of them."

The horse had been shot through the head, and was soon dead.

The detective then pushed on, and looked closely as he went for any signs of the bandits.

As it was in the early part of the evening, they saw lights in farm-houses as they rode by.

At one of them they inquired if any horsemen had passed that way since sunset.

"Yes—an hour ago somebody passed here," was the reply.

They knew the bandits were not an hour ahead of them.

"Have none passed here later than that?" Haynes asked.

"No."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"You would have heard 'em?"

"I have heard horses."

"How many went by an hour ago?"

"Some four or five or six, or mebbe more."

"Very definite. Which way were they going?"

"Down the road."

"Which is down?"

"South."

"Ah! We are looking for parties going North."

"They hain't come this way to-night."

"That settles it."

Haynes turned away in disgust.

They had probably gone into the woods or turned into some cross-road.

"Let's push on to the next town and get a good rest," and they did so, reaching one about midnight.

The hotel proprietor didn't want to take them in, being suspicious of them.

But Haynes showed him certain papers, and satisfied him that they were what they claimed to be.

They found good quarters and slept well till morning.

The James Boys were terribly demoralized after they were fired into on the highway.

Jim Cummins' horse was killed, and Wood Hite and Jim Younger slightly wounded by bullets.

Cummins sprang up and ran forward for a quarter of a mile, giving the signal of distress all the time.

Then they came to a halt and found out what damage had been done.

"We must turn and go south again," Jesse said. "That fellow is on our trail, and we can't shake him off."

"Here is a cross road," said Jim, who was on foot.

"Then that's our route."

They turned into it and went steadily forward all night.

When Jim was tired walking, one of the others would dismount and let him ride.

They struck a railroad crossing and found a road running alongside of it.

By sunrise they struck a little town, from which they resolved to ship their horses to Kansas City.

The agent learned by telegraphing that a stock train would be along about noon.

They waited for it and saw their jaded animals safely shipped to Kansas City.

Jim Younger boarded the train and went along to see that they had feed and water at the proper times.

"Now, boys," said Jesse, "we'll do a little business up this way to make the people think we have moved up here to stay. There are seven of us. We'll take the next train up and go in the same direction Haynes has been running us—and it's the longest run we ever made—and get off at some station or town and hold up a stage or two. When we have got the people aroused we'll go back to old Missouri."

"That's the best programme you ever got up, Jesse," Col. Younger remarked, "only you have left out one important thing."

"What's that?"

"The hanging of Hal Haynes."

"Yes—yes—don't leave that out!" exclaimed Cummins. "I want to do the hanging act in that play myself."

"So do all of us," put in Wood Hite. "I've got his private mark on my shoulder yet, and only his blood can wipe it out."

"I think I am entitled to the satisfaction of wiping him out," said Bob Younger.

"Yes, I think so, too, Bob," put in Frank.

"Well, we've got to catch him first," remarked Jesse. "Come, let us buy tickets. The train will be here soon."

"But to what point?" Cole asked.

Jesse stopped to consider.

"To Kansas City," he said.

"But that's the other way!"

"Yes. It won't do to go north from here after sending our horses south. Even the ticket agent here would think it strange. Let him see us off for Kansas City, so as to say we went that way. We can get off below and take an up train."

"That's it. That's a good idea."

They bought seven tickets for Kansas City and took the south-bound passenger train when it came along.

After going about sixty miles they got out at a thriving little town and waited for the up train.

They strolled about the little town and made some purchases in the way of clean shirts, and each bought a hand-bag to assist in the appearance of things.

When they returned to the station only two bought tickets to the same point.

Others bought for other points, and thus even the agent of the road was deceived.

That night they reached an important little town ninety miles up the road, and put up at the best hotel in the place.

They had made complete changes in their disguises, and had no fear of recognition from any quarter.

When they arose the next morning they found in the newspaper at the hotel that the people of that part of the country were very much excited over the visit of the James Boys to their State.

One paper located Haynes in another county, and Jesse chuckled as he read it.

He spent the day finding out the lay of things, carefully avoiding making inquiries of anybody.

He learned that a well-patronized stage line ran from there to an important point on another road some thirty miles away.

Pretending to be a land buyer he hired a double-seated buggy from a livery stable to go a few miles out into the country.

Jim Cummins hired another one at the other stable, and followed him out of town on the same road.

Some four or five miles out they hid the vehicle in the woods and then waited for the stage.

When it came along it was full inside and had four passengers on top.

Jesse James was the first to appear in the road, and when his terrible—

"Halt! Hold up!" was heard it struck terror to the hearts of every one.

"Whoa! Whoa!" cried the driver, holding up his team. "Road agents, as I live!" and he glared at the seven masked men like one gazing at a ghost.

"The man who gives trouble will be shot!" Jesse said. "Get out now and hold up your hands!"

A tall, elderly man groaned as he got out.

Another whispered:

"I have a revolver. How many of you are armed?"

Only one other man had one.

"Two against seven. It won't do."

"No."

"We are ruined."

"Yes, and——"

"Get out and hold up your hands!" came in stern command again.

They got out and stood trembling before the seven black masks.

The bandits went through them quickly and secured a rich harvest.

Nearly all the thirteen passengers had come with money for investment in lands in that part of the State, which was having a big boom.

Ten had gold watches and seven wore diamonds.

They were cleaned out.

The tall, elderly man had several thousand dollars in a belt round his waist, and when it was taken from him he groaned piteously.

"Now you may go on," Jesse said to them. "You have paid toll."

They scrambled back into the stage, and it went away at almost full speed.

As soon as it was out of sight the bandits got the two vehicles out of the woods and hurried back to town.

They had a half hour to spare when they reached there, so they paid their bills and went to the railroad station.

There they took an up train and went seventy miles up the road, where they stopped for the night at a little country hotel, and made a division of the plunder they had secured.

"That was a good haul," Jim Cummins said, as he pocketed his share.

"Yes, it paid well," admitted Jesse. "One more like that somewhere up here will wake up the country and call out a dozen sheriffs' posses."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

The last stage hold-up electrified the people in that part of the country.

The sheriff called out a strong posse, armed with Winchesters, and people now everywhere seemed to get a shot at the bandits.

Jesse James and his bandits were seventy miles away the next morning and ready for another hold-up.

They found another stage line that seemed to be doing a good business, and they resolved to hold up one of its stages.

This time they went out three miles on foot and held it up in a very dismal part of the road.

It didn't pan out as well as the preceding one had, but it paid for the trouble.

An hour later they were on the down train, and the next day, late in the evening, landed in Kansas City and hunted up Jim Younger, who had charge of their horses.

They knew where to find him, and within an hour after their arrival they were with him.

The Kansas City papers had accounts of the exploits of the James Boys up in Iowa and Wisconsin, and congratulated the State of Missouri that they had been driven out by the intrepid detective, Hal Haynes.

Again Jesse James chuckled and shook hands with himself.

"There isn't a posse out on the road in the whole State of Missouri," he said to himself, as he laid down the paper. "We can now rest and recuperate and watch that intrepid detective, Hal Haynes, from a quiet standpoint. Yes, we'll rest a month and then resume business."

The next week was spent in purchasing new wardrobes, and they spent a good deal of time in perfecting their disguises, so as to render recognition by acquaintances an impossibility.

Then they agreed to meet on a certain midnight at McCoomb's Landing on the river, in Bailey's saloon, and decide then what they should do next.

"Until then every man is his own master," Jesse said, as they shook hands and separated.

Bob and Jim immediately set out for the old moonshiner's place in the great forest, well supplied with presents for the girls in the family.

Wood Hite and Jim Younger were to join them there a day or two later, first going to another county to see some relatives there.

Their sudden appearance at the big farm-house was greeted with glad shouts of welcome by the entire family.

But the young girl Myra flew to Bob's arms with a glad cry and told him he should not leave her again.

Bettie was equally ardent with Cummins, and when he told the others that Wood and Younger would be along in a day or two there was still more rejoicing.

Two days later the other two arrived, and then everything was lovely.

They would have a whole month of vacation, and, as they were well provided with presents and cash, they were doubly welcomed by the old couple.

In the mean time the James Boys, Jesse and Frank, paid a visit to their mother.

But they found that her home was constantly watched by detectives, so their visit was cut short.

Jesse went to St. Jo, where he had a home of his own under the name of Howard, and Frank returned to Kansas City, to put up at a hotel and take life easy until the time arrived for the band to meet again.

Two weeks later, old Dr. Gray was seated in his office, looking quite blue over the reports in the papers that the James Boys had been driven out of the State.

His niece, Sallie, was herself again, and she had shown him the reports in the papers.

"If it's true," he said to her, "it is a great loss to me."

"Yes, uncle," she replied, "but you have enough in bank to keep us from want even if you never earn another dollar."

"True, dear; but one does not want to eat up his substance."

"What should he do with it? He can't take it away with him."

"I want to leave it to you."

"There will be enough, uncle, even if you don't add another penny to it."

"You talk like a very foolish child," he said, patting her on the head. "I cannot think of living on my bank account. If they have left the State for good we must economize as much as possible."

"We can't economize any more than we do, uncle," she replied. "I have cut down expenses to the lowest notch and cannot go any farther in that direction without going hungry. A person who loves money so much as to go hungry in order to save it is insane and ought to be locked up."

She had told him that so often that he didn't even laugh at it any more.

It ended as usual—in she having her own way about it.

Just as she was about to leave his office a knock on the front door startled her.

She went to see who it was and found a stranger there.

"Is the doctor in?" the man asked.

"Yes, sir," and she held the door open for him.

He entered and she led the way to the doctor's little office.

The doctor arose and looked at the newcomer.

"Take a seat, sir," he said.

The man did so and said:

"I am glad to see you looking so well, doctor."

"Hello! By jingo! I'm glad to see you!" and he grasped the man's hand and shook it warmly.

The man smiled and said:

"Yes, I am glad to get back among old friends again."

"I was just reading that you were hundreds of miles away from here," the doctor replied.

"Yes; I've read it in a dozen papers myself," and he smiled.

"Where is your horse?"

"Out of town a bit."

"Safe?"

"Yes."

"Safer than here in my stable?"

"Yes, for one day."

"Can't you stay longer?"

"No, not at present."

"Why?"

"Good reasons."

"Yes, of course."

"Any of the Kearney boys got back?"

"Yes, they are all back."

"Seen Haynes?"

"Yes."

"Speak to him?"

"No, of course not."

"Any of the posse?"

"Yes. I talked with two of 'em."

"What do they say?"

"They say Haynes is no match for you at all."

"What does he say to that?"

"I hear that he says he is done with posses forever—that some one was always kicking and finding fault with anything he did."

"Yes—yes—of course," and the great bandit chief laughed quietly as he spoke.

Then he drew a roll of bills from his pocket and counted out the old doctor's pay and handed it to him.

The old man's eyes sparkled as he received it, for there was a good deal of the miser in him.

"Is Haynes here now?"

"No," the doctor replied.

"When did he leave here?"

"A day or two ago."

"Don't know which way he went?"

"No."

"Heard anything about his leaving?"

"I heard some say he had gone out to hunt you up."

"By himself?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope he may find me."

"Yes," and they both smiled.

In a little while the bandit chief went out and made his way to Martin's hotel, where he went to the bar and took a drink.

Then he sat around for an hour or two and listened to what people were saying.

Then he went out for a stroll through the main business street of the town.

Suddenly he came face to face with young Myra Crouch, the old moonshiner's young fourteen-year-old daughter.

She was accompanied by a young man whom he could not make out.

That she had come to town alone he could not believe, and the young man was a stranger to him.

He knew of her mad infatuation for Bob Younger before they took their long run, and could not understand this new man.

"Maybe it is Bob himself," he said. "The rascal is good at getting up disguises. I'll find out, anyhow," and he gave the old signal used by the bandit.

Instantly the young man stopped, looked around and returned it. Jesse laughed, and made another which brought the young man to his side.

"Is it you, Bob?"

"Yes," and they shook hands.

"What are you doing here?"

"Just giving the girl a picnic."

"When did you come in?"

"To-day."

"And Jim—where is he?"

"He and Bettie are down the street in a restaurant."

"Did you know Haynes had come back?" Jesse asked.

"Yes, I hear so."

"He is on the still hunt now and you want to lie low. I'll go and see Jim," and he turned and made his way down the street.

Bob rejoined the young girl.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Don't ask questions."

She knew then that the stranger was one of the bandits.

But she had learned not to ask too many questions, and so she went on up the street with him, going into stores and buying such things as her childish tastes fancied.

Jesse went down to the restaurant and found Jim and the buxom Bettie partaking of a game dinner.

He soon made himself known to him and had a short talk with him, after which he went out and made his way up the street again.

As he feared, Myra was recognized as one of the Crouch girls by a citizen who had served several times as one of the posse.

Jesse saw two men watching them, and soon passed them, saying in a low tone of voice:

"You are shadowed; join Jim at once."

Bob looked around and saw two men watching him.

Taking the girl's hand in his he strolled down the street to the restaurant where Jim and Bettie were still discussing their meal.

"We must go," he said to Jim. "We are being shadowed, and I think they are getting men together to arrest us."

Jim and Bettie at once arose and went out with them, Jim stopping at the desk long enough to pay the score.

Out on the street they saw the two men shadowing them, and Jesse was a little further off looking on with a good deal of interest.

Their horses were hitched to posts in the rear of some stores, and to them the two couples made their way in a very leisurely manner.

The two men who were shadowing them did not know that they were about to leave until the two girls were lifted into their saddles.

Then the two bandits mounted their horses and the four rode away.

Jesse saw that the two spies were very much exercised over the two couples going off.

One of them turned and ran up the street, and the other followed the horses till he saw them going out of town by the main road which led in the direction of the old moonshiner's home.

Jesse mingled with the citizens, and in the bar-room at Martin's

he heard it stated that two of Crouch's girls had been seen in town with two young men who were believed to be members of the James Boys' band.

"Why didn't the constables arrest them?" he asked a citizen.

"Because one or two men can't do it," was the reply.

"Why not?"

"They are too handy with their revolvers. A man wants good backing when he holds up one of the James Boys."

"They are a bad crowd, I know, but get the drop on one of them and he'll wilt at once."

"Of course. But getting the drop on him is the trouble."

"Yes, I suppose so. But I heard the James Boys had been run out of the State."

"Yes, so they were, but the detective lost 'em and they got away. He is trying to get on to their trail again."

"Have they come back to Missouri?"

"Nobody knows yet."

"Did they let those two fellows go without questioning them?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's strange."

"Oh, they will go out to the old moonshiner's home and bag 'em. If they are not members of the band no harm will be done. If they are they will be hanged on the spot. That is what I hear 'em say."

Jesse then went out and made his way to where he had left Siroc, and, springing into the saddle, he dashed away at race-horse speed.

He overtook the two couples ere they reached home, and told them of their danger.

"Now, Bob, you, Jim, Wood and your brother must leave there to-night. I don't want it known we are back in Missouri till we are ready to resume business."

Bettie and Myra protested.

"No, they must go. It is necessary. I don't care where they go, but they must not be found near your home, girls."

"Very well; you know best."

Jesse then rode on and the couples went home.

But the Crouch family loaded up everything they had on two wagons, locked up the house and moved away, the four bandits going with them.

Two days later a posse of forty men surrounded the house which they had deserted and found it empty.

They applied the torch and burned it to the ground, after which they returned to Kearney.

The Crouches moved over to Kettle Creek Valley, forty miles away, and bought a small farm over there.

Hal Haynes spent several weeks in a vain search for the James Boys, and then came back to Kearney to see if he could not get a chance to hypnotize old Dr. Gray's niece again, and thus get some information as to their whereabouts.

But the old doctor heard of his return, and, as he walked about the streets of the town a good deal, he suspected his object.

He met him and said:

"Haynes, you are here again. If you practice your infernal art on my niece, I will shoot you down like a dog. I give you fair warning."

"I shall not try to do so, doctor," was the reply.

A few days later the detective gave up the case and returned to his home, though he had gained a great reputation for having chased the James Boys a thousand miles.

THE END.

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